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LET CHILDREN COME

SERVE THE YOUNGER

Samuel Rayan

THE OTHER FACE OF INDIA

1. STREET CHILDREN

Gerry J. Pinto

2. NO ROOF BUT THE STARS

3. RAG-PICKERS' PEDAGOGY

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4. IF YOU ARE THERE I CAN DO IT

Jeanne de Vos

THE CHILD KRISHNA

Noel Sheth

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JEEVADHARA

The Living Christ

LET CHILDREN COME

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Editorial

Those who count tell us that three fifths of the world's population consist of children. It is good to see once in your life children being counted. Usually children (and women) are not counted as they are not in the bread stories in Matthew's gospel, and as they were not when voting-(paper-)democracy began, and are not in some legal, judicial and religious systems even today. In many cultures, battering them, use of violence to force them into adult (or male) ways, and manipulating their minds and affections are considered normal and natural. The importance of children, however, does not lie merely in their numbers. Every person is precious, is a universe of values. This issue of *Jeevadhara* is a small, and partial, attempt at exploring some aspects of the mystery of the child.

While scanning these pages, please, keep in mind the children you love, the children you have seen, the children who have surprised you or angered you, or disgusted you; do keep in mind their beauty, smile, tears, distended bellies, tattered clothes, games, tantrums, hunger, sunken eyes, songs, thin arms put out to beg, last gasps hardly audible even to the mother sitting by and watching in despair, her mind numb with sorrow.

Children are sensitive and open. They are intelligent, swift to learn, to register, to co-ordinate, to synthesise, to respond. Quickly they become inventive and creative. Each is a casket of throbbing promises and possibilities. There is no telling what they could become and do and contribute to human culture, to the life of the world by way of art, beauty, peace, freedom, justice, equality, statesmanship, social organisation, psychological insights, moral and spiritual achievements and new human relationships. That is, if we care. If they are properly fed, clothed, sheltered, loved, protected, guided chal-

lenged, respected, responded to, accompanied and liberated they can become untold blessing for our earth and an unspeakable revelation of the Divine. This promise is a measure of the responsibility towards children that parents, families, villages and cities, educational and cultural institutions, governments and religions have.

Does humankind 'owe the child the best it has to give', as a UNESCO report states? Is it a primary principle of social justice that succour and support should go first to the neediest? Could social justice to the child in the present global context be effective unless it is realised by all nations whether developed, developing or underdeveloped?

In the seven countries that make up SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) there are 400 million children under the age of five. In them 34 million children are born each year. Only a small percentage of them grow up to healthy productive adulthood.

In India there are 301 million children under 14 years. This is the largest child population in the world. A large percentage of children perish in the age group of 0-5 years. Of the surviving children only a small proportion have access to adequate food, health and education. A third of the world's child labour population is also concentrated in India. The official estimate, based on a sample survey conducted in 1983 puts the figure at 17.36 million. A Baroda research group claims India has 44 million child workers. More recent studies affirm the existence of at least 100 million child labourers. In the 1971 census 16.53 percent of India's child population figured as orphans. Independent studies on child destitution in India put the figure at 38.06 million orphaned children below 14 years of age.

Children, humankind's hope and promise of the future, are loved and cared for in many homes and cultures. In others – and these are the majority worldwide – children are over-burdened with books and adult syllabuses, forced into a compe-

titive educational system in which hundreds of them crack up before they are 13, denied leisure, play and childhood, fettered with bourgeois prejudices and interests which may not be questioned, or are stricken with poverty and wretchedness, are neglected, starved, abused, used, tortured, repressed, mutilated, and despised, their growth blocked in a variety of ways. So it is not so much that children die as they are done to death by our economic and social systems. The poverty and misery that kills and maims children is man-made, systemic and culturally maintained. There are many interests that conspire to clip children's wings, to domesticate them and to trim them to size so that they fit nicely into the straight jacket of conventional society controlled by the powerful.

It is in this global and Indian context that we devote these pages to a preliminary reflection on the religious significance of children, childhood and youth. Samuel Rayan raises the question of meaning of the "partiality" shown to the child and the young in the Bible. It seems that the child or the little one is a soteriological, christological term. God is partial to the "little" people, those who are disprivileged and powerless, who do not matter in societies whose prime values are money and muscle. Our plan to pursue into the Gospels the theme of the child and its theological-spiritual significance, has not materialized. We regret the resultant imbalance of this volume. Gerry J. Pinto gives us a general picture of the condition of children in India. Anselm Rosario and Jeanne de Vos present us to some (deprived, threatened, refugee, beloved, brave) little Christ-figures in actual life today. Anselm also explains the philosophy and pedagogy being developed by the Rag-pickers Education and Development Scheme, Bangalore. Noel Sheth contemplates the plays and pranks of child Krishna, the beloved of millions in our land. He seeks to point to the possible spiritual and psychological significance of Balakrishna's *leela*. Parental affection for God, to which Sheth calls attention is spiritual attitude and experience which non-Hindu traditions would do well to consider. The Balakrishna stories express the absolute freedom and joy of God. They also make India's Kṛṣṇa culture and Kṛṣṇa devotion face the challenge of our starved, neglected, hard-

worked and humiliated children. Have we of the Krsna culture nothing to say or do when millions of "child Krsnas" are being poisoned by modern Puthanas, dashed to death by modern Kamsas, maimed by modern Bakas and destroyed by the other monsters of our times? If we have nothing to say or do for the oppressed children do we not forfeit our right to the memory and the name of Balakrsna and of the Christ Child, and all the freshness, freedom and joy they bring?

Dlehi

Samuel Rayan

Serve the Younger

Salaam Bombay, Mira Nair's film, has attracted attention on two counts: (1) It is good as a film, it is a work of art; it was among the films named for the Oscar award this year. (2) Its theme speaks to every mind and heart which has some measure of humanity left in it. The story concerns a young boy who is abandoned by his family to the streets of Bombay where he consorts with thieves, drug pedlars, prostitutes and pimps. The story concerns all the boys and girls of India. It concerns India's honour, India's conscience, India's economic, political and judicial systems. It concerns the honour of India's religions, cultures and ethical values. It concerns the honour and the future of humankind. John Vattamattam reminds us that 'the growing child is the most important being in the world. The quicker all of us realise this the better for everyone. Realise it and work to nurture the flowers of the future'. More than forty years ago the United Nations declared among other things:

The child shall enjoy special protection and shall be given opportunities and facilities, by law and by other means, to enable him to develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually and socially in healthy and normal conditions of freedom and dignity. In the enactment of laws for this purpose the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration...

The rights guaranteed to all children without exception and without distinction or discrimination include the right to adequate pre-natal and post-natal care; the right from birth to a name and nationality; the right to a happy childhood, the right to adequate nutrition, adequate housing, and medical care, to parental affection, love and understanding, to an education, to special care for the child who is handicapped, to be

among the first to receive relief in times of disaster, to develop abilities, to enjoy full opportunity for play and recreation and to learn to be useful members of society. These rights have been universally recognised, and universally violated or neglected. Forty years since the declaration! But the plight of the world's children has not altered substantially.

Children usually are the first and worst victims of war, famine, poverty, destitution, disease, neglect and parental frustration or ambition or vice. In Auschwitz and Dachau, in Hiroshima and Nagasaki tens of thousands of children were among the burning victims of bourgeois reason, capitalist politics and liberal science. It is history's witness that "Europeans of other centuries often destroyed children they could not provide for. Now infanticide has become rare. Few of us mourn its passing. But the fact that infanticide persisted so long in the face of persuasive teaching and fearsome penalties tells us something about the poverty and population pressure under which people once lived in Western countries. It may also help us understand some apparently barbaric practices of people outside the West today"².

Modhumita Mojumdar was told by a friend that his grandfather from Kashmir had no sister "since all the girls that were born in that family were killed by their parents". Even today the girl child is barely tolerated in India. Sex-determination tests are followed by quick abortion. The destruction of over 9000 female fetuses after amniocentesis was reported not long ago within a span of some two years in the hospitals of Bombay alone. The alternative seems to be having an unwanted child and ill-treating her until she is got rid of in marriage. "Actual ill-treatment of girls is not as rare as one would imagine." The boy is wanted, well-fed, sent to school, trained to a career: the girl is barely tolerated, often poorly fed, made to work from childhood, denied schooling, and "is told in so many ways that preparing for marriage and motherhood is all that is expected of her"³.

Sex is not the only basis of neglect and hostility. The victims of the Delhi pogrom, 1984, and the Carbide Gas victims of Bhopal, 1984, have been neglected too and ignored.

The government which assumed responsibility to uphold the cause of the gas victims has been slower than snail to show real concern; and when finally it clandestinely reached a settlement the victims felt they had been betrayed. In all such cases it is children and women that suffer most. Writes a citizen:

Time, they say, is a great healer. But the case of the victims of the November 1984 holocaust is without parallel. The wounds of the surviving children are so deep that even this long period (five years) has been unable to heal them. Thousands of orphans have been crying for help and justice ... it seems that no organisation has come to their rescue... None of the culprits of the anti-Sikh riots has been punished so far... They are further likely to feel severely hurt when on one pretext or another policemen of Tilak Vihar colony harass these children and abuse them in filthy language⁴.

In India "a child dies every fifteen seconds from preventable diseases". Millions of children below the age of five die each year: they die of malnutrition imposed on them, on their parents, on their grandparents and great grand parents, by our social-economic system. Generations of hunger, dishonour, anxiety and self-depreciation: the joy of life ebbing; the zest for life running out. Children born into death's arms. Born only to flicker and become extinct like the flame of a lamp with no oil left. In the labour room in Shardaben Civic Hospital, Ahmedabad, on Friday, 17th of March 1988, a new-born child was bitten on its neck and face by a cat while two nurses sat outside and the mother lay behind a curtain. The child died. The event is not unique; it is typical.

Children are absent from our television screens. Their problems are rarely presented or discussed. There is a child-show in a blue-moon in which it is the upper and middle class well-fed, well-clothed chubby children that are exhibited. Not really for their sake, but to advertise the prosperity of their parents. Children are show-pieces; or ads tools along with their grown-up sisters. One rarely finds on our TV screens the emaciated, starved, filth-covered beggar children, clothed in torn rags and scavenging for food in the roadside bins

near fashionable eating places; or the little ones working long hours in factories and farms for less than a pittance. They are not shown because their truth is not palatable; their truth would belie much public propaganda about progress and about elimination of poverty. It might unsettle the tranquillized Consciences of many middle class men and political higher-ups.

A letter dated early December, 1988, describes "the hardships... of the poor refugees in the outskirts of Juba City (Sudan). Thank God, they declared a cease-fire, and allowed some relief to get in. They say the famine there now is worse than it was in Ethiopia. There is practically no children under two years old left, and of those under five, only the boys survived because food was given to them over their sisters".

A UNICEF report, "Children on the Frontline", devoted to the nine countries of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference, focuses on the children of the war-ravaged Mozambique and Angola where "fighting has caused a worsening of every measurement of child-welfare". It is calculated that the social and economic consequences of the war in Southern Africa kill 25 children every hour. "If the present situation persists, over 150,000 infants in the region would continue to die each year." The war here is the war of Contras, created and propped up by the same super-power and ideology as makes and continues the Contras war in Nicaragua. What if people suffer and die? War brings profit to big corporations. Since 1980 nearly 850,000 infants and young children have died as a result of the strife in the region, which together has lost one million people during this period, exceeding the total number of soldiers the U. S. A. has lost in all the wars since 1776. Health and education programs have been severely hit by the conflict. In Mozambique the destruction of school buildings in rural areas has led to a drop of enrolment to 46 percent. In Angola it has dipped to less than 50 percent from 66 in 1982. Quality of education has also suffered because the cost of war and related economic decline "have forced cuts in books, equipment, furniture, writing materials and maintenance of buildings".

The report shows that out of a total of 3.5 million annual births in the nine countries covered by it, about 750,000 children die before reaching the age of five. What the region needs is peace and development, food, primary health care, basic educational facilities and generation of employment. In Namibia children have to endure the worst of two evils: "the apartheid system imposed by South Africa and a brutal war".

"Rampant child-abuse in Kenya" was a recent headline in the daily newspapers. Why single out Kenya for something quite widespread? There are serious burn injuries in 11-year old Dominic Opaka Mwachi's hands. This is the punishment his father meted out to him for allegedly stealing a watch. A 12-year old boy's parents poured gasoline over him and set him afire because he had 'stolen' a shilling. Then there was the girl who was murdered by her father because she failed a test in school. Young victims all, of adult anxiety and insanity. A few cases that have come to light while many more remain in the dark. A number of parents have received jail sentences for assaulting, mistreating or neglecting their children. Robert Kamakyu, for instance, was sentenced to two years in jail because he battered to death his six-year old daughter for "stealing" 30 shillings (about Rs. 23/-). Down the ages corporal punishment has been an accepted method of child-rearing. Doctors who treat injured children believe that beating children for "stealing" is a widespread practice among parents. Punishment varies from tribe to tribe in Kenya. Some tribes are known to stick pieces of hay or straw into the finger-nails of an unruly child and then set them on fire⁵.

Summer and Winter mean different things to the upper and middle classes of Delhi on the one hand and to the street children on the other. T. C. Malhotra has been observing how on the approach of summer the former start worrying about water in their cooler. "Summer for them is a time of shortages — of water, electricity, vegetables... Little wonder they prefer Winter." It is the otherway round for Delhi's street children. In the hot season, "no longer do they need to huddle around meagre fires and scrounge among torn woollens. Now it is time for the lice to come out of their hair

before a good bath in the river or even at the India Gate canals. It is time for some fun and frolic amid the jhuggis and the squalor after a hard day's work". That is the mood in Summer. But how is it through the year irrespective of the seasons and their changefulness?

Living in a jhuggi or the pavement naturally hardens a human being more than anything else can. It is expected that there would be no water in the municipality taps, so that does not faze the residents half as much as it would the housewife in a Delhi Development Authority's flat. A big advantage over ministers, they do not have to worry about the lawn not being watered.

But there are other things that touch you more deeply and grip your vitals. One such reality is hunger.

Hunger knows no season, and the street children go to work just as their parents do, never bothering about the laws on child labour. The work is known to be back-breaking; it is known to stunt the normal growth of a human being. But so what? Food comes first.

Food is scarce. Fuel comes next. Fuel is scarce. Kerosene is rare. Ration cards are not available, unless some politician graciously intervenes and gives a card in exchange for votes⁶. The kerosene lamp flickers as the oil runs dry. So does street and slum children's lives. The night is never far.

Youth and child homelessness is a major issue of justice. Some have no home at all. They live on pavements and under trees. Others run away from home for longer or shorter periods of time. They do it because of hunger at home, or domination, cruelty, violence, drunkenness, sexual abuse. There is the story of a 16-year old Irish boy who fled home because his dad was always dominating, always ordering him about, always fighting with Mamma, hitting her, and hitting him for sticking to Ma. A 17-year old boy tells of how he left home and slept in rubbish chutes, sheds or empty flats. "I kept robbing for food. I took stuff off the back of lorries. Whenever I would rob I would eat for ages. Sometimes I would rob houses. The first thing I would go for was the fridge. I fell asleep one night in a house and got caught." There is the story of another 17-year old who grew up watching his

father hit his mother and treat her like dirt. He too had a share of his hitting. So he took to drugs, then to robbing and finally, left home when his parents took to drinking. "I could go home", says he, "if I wanted, but I don't." One more story, this time an 18-year old girl's:

When I was about seven I was put into a foster home. So were my two sisters. I was fostered till I was 16. I didn't like the foster home much, but I had no choice in the matter. I ran away when I was 16 and made my way home... (my mother) told me to get out of the house, so I just left. I slept rough for a while in buses, trains, cars. During the day I would just walk around town with my friends. We used to rob handbags and forge cheques. I used to sniff glue or gas...⁷

These are not merely Irish stories. They are classics. You meet them everywhere. Children run away or are thrown out; they wander looking for food, for work, for security, for shelter, for friendship, for peace, for dignity. They are exploited by a heartless society. They land in brothels, are sold to the unscrupulous, are maimed and ill-treated, are abused until they are drained of all sense of dignity, respect or self-esteem. They are made to work or beg for the benefit of musclemen or organised crime. One finds them in railway stations, bus stands and city streets all over India. Their plight is a measure of the degradation and callousness of our society. It is an indictment of our social system, a tangible proof beyond all manipulable statistics of the profound failure of the system to which we have bonded ourselves, a system that stands condemned by its own inhumanity. It only remains for the hands of the wretched of the earth to tear the system down and sweep it away to make room for a different economic-social set-up in which all children will have enough rice to eat, a roof to sleep under and opportunity to grow up and develop into human persons with responsibility and dignity, with deep humanity, and a heart that can feel. Meanwhile we should accept that the plight of children is a shame sitting on all of us.

The present disgraceful situation is due to lack of political will. It is due to political inertia, and failure to

allocate necessary resources. It is due to lack of interest on the part of statutory agencies. It is a problem of structural injustice, and a creature of the dominant ideology. The dominant philosophy of survival of the hard-hitting and the profit-grabbing is reluctant to eliminate homelessness, joblessness, hunger or poverty. That is why misery is also developing in the "developed" societies. Therefore before every begging, hungry, haggard and homeless child the leadership of the nation and its political, judicial and economic institutions should kneel and seek forgiveness and promise correction. For the right to food, home and education is a fundamental human right, and it stands conspicuously violated. A document of the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace says:

We are convinced that a house is much more than a simple roof over one's head. The place where a person creates and lives out his or her life also serves to found, in some way, that person's deepest identity and his or her relationship with others⁸.

On April 29, 1989, some 400 child workers demonstrated in Delhi to highlight their plight. The Rally, organised by the NGO Forum for Street and Working Children, a federation of 22 voluntary bodies, was an attempt to awaken public conscience to the condition of India's street children "who have lost their dreams in a forced encounter with life-size problems when it was time for them to play and learn"⁹. Children who had lost their childhood, whose childhood had been stolen from them and destroyed even as it was destroyed by emergent capitalism of the 18th and 19th century England where children of 6 to 12 were made to work for 12 to 13 hours a day in smoky dusty factories! The capitalists grew rich, the children died young, few of them reaching the age of 20. The posters carried by the Delhi street children summed up their anguish and their hope:

"Your waste is my living", said one poster.

"Must I sweat till my blood runs to water?" asked another.

"I am not a beggar by choice", another informed the Prime Minister, the Parliament and the Indian nation.

The children, young and not so young, in tattered clothes, dishevelled and unkempt, had similar stories to tell.

Chittaranjan, engaged in weaving work on a monthly wage of Rs 50/-, said that more often than not his salary was cut for no reason; at times he had to rest content with Rs 10/-. But he goes to a school in the hope of a better tomorrow. Sirajul sells rags and newspapers to make a meagre living. He said: "At times we are accused of theft and beaten up by the public. The police also beat us up on false charges. Nobody comes to our rescue." Jamuna, a girl of 13, picks rags to supplement the family income. Being a girl she also has to do all the household work. That leaves her little or no time to study or to go to school¹⁰.

"The issue of child labour assumes importance", says Saraswati of the Indian Council of Child Welfare, "by the fact that India has the largest number of working children in the world." Estimates range between 13.6 million and 45 million. Govind Mukhoty, senior advocate in the Supreme Court of India, writes:

In spite of the tall promises given by the framers of the Constitution, 45 million children in this country have been added to the work force. Nearly 50,000 children in Sivakasi, Tamil Nadu, between the ages 3-14 work for nearly 12 hours a day in match and fireworks factories. In the glass bangle factory at Ferozabad, U. P., thousands of children work only at nights for 8 months a year. Their age varies between 8 and 14 years. They are paid Rs 3/- a day for 8 hours work in the factory where the temperature is between 40-50 degree Celsius. In the carpet weaving industries in Rajasthan, Mirzapur and Jammu and Kashmir, thousands of children work in dark rooms inhaling air thick with cotton fluff and wool. 60 percent become asthmatic and suffer from pulmonary tuberculosis. There are millions of children working as domestic servants, hotel boys in tea stalls/shops, and sometimes as coolies and rag-pickers¹¹.

"Save the working children" is a plea ILO Information made last year. It pointed out how "by the age of 8 they are making bricks in Columbia, or diving for fish in the Philippines, or tanning leather in Egypt. The legions of child workers are vast and mostly uncounted". Some experts esti-

mate that at least 100 million boys and girls around the world are working; and possibly even twice that number. Children of five and above go selling eggs, cigarettes, candles, fruits, and newspapers; or go cleaning shoes and vehicles, or picking berries — all to add a bit to family income. In factories work is arduous, mechanised, fast, dangerous. Work hours are usually long, wages are meagre, fringe benefits are nil, and insurance and social security are absent. In some cases as in the gold mines of Peru, medicines used and work days lost are deducted from wages. Work is often performed in conditions of extreme heat, dust and noise. Accidents and injury are common due to unsafe working conditions, lack of experience in children, fatigue, or the fact that children have to work using machines designed for adults¹².

Foremost in employing children are unregistered small industries which operate in a world of competition and uncertainty. Children can be forced to work fast, can be paid low, laid off at will, recruited easily, and cannot form or join trade unions. Children are robbed of their childhood by violence in the families, by early assumption of the burden of family responsibilities, congested living conditions, competitive school system which strains and pressurises children to breaking point, and pervasive poverty and hunger. Amid all the fatuous talk about galloping towards the 21st century, millions of India's children "keep picking through the garbage dumps, scavenging for bits of food or sorting out what is usable". And little boys not even eight years old "working an 18-hour day washing utensils in restaurants and bars. We still use children to scrub and clean our homes while our (own) overfed, well-dressed children go to school or sprawl around watching television"¹³.

Patricia Palaparti bids us pause to think. If we comply, what we find is sure to unsettle us; that is, if we have a conscience. So many things we use, things which have become part of our daily life — the glasses we drink from, the matches we use, the beedis we smoke, the carpets we step on, the bangles we wear, the embroidery we flaunt, the diamonds we show off — "are all produced by tiny hands, hands that should be playing, writing, reaching out in pure, undiluted,

unencumbered joy”¹⁴. The ‘Lawyers’ Collective’ places before us some shocking and shaming statistics and facts. Consider for instance how

Children are kidnapped, tortured and forced to work in subhuman conditions in the carpet industry in Mirzapur. A survey ordered by the Supreme Court found that 41 percent of carpet weavers in U. P. are under age of 14, and 48 percent of these received no wages, only food. The rest got Re 1/- to Rs 5/- per day. The kind of work they do causes eye problems, skin problems, filaria, asthma, TB, enlarged lymph glands.

If you ask, Why does not the Government act? Why are our laws against exploitation of children not enforced? The answer is: “According to reports, the carpet production might fall by 50 percent if children were not employed, and ‘India’ not be able to compete in the international market.” Again, the question, Whose Government is it? Whose interests are there to safeguard? For whom is ‘India’ competing? And who is this ‘India’? The answer is plain. Or, look at “the diamond cutting units of Surat, employing about two lakh workers of whom 15 percent are children. The children...live and work in squalid ill-ventilated factory premises for 12-15 hours a day. Eye strain, head-ache, and TB, skin diseases, viral and urinary infections are their reward. The pittance they eke out is an average daily earning of Rs 15/-”¹⁵.

50,000 children below 15 years are employed by the match industry in Sivakasi. Almost the entire production is non-mechanical. “Between 3 a. m. and 5 a. m. every morning children are woken up in the surrounding villages and loaded into buses—over 200 packed into a single bus and taken to the factories. Between 6 p. m. and 9. p.m. they are returned to their houses. Though they work only 12 hours they are away from home for 15-16 hours a day. Most children are below seven years of age. Girls outnumber boys 3 to 1... Children who stamp frames suffer from heat, toxic fumes, and excessive strain on the arm and shoulders. Delay of a second can cause the entire frame to go up in flames causing instant death... The children earn Rs 2/- to Rs 7/- per day.”¹⁶ Similar accounts are available about child workers in balloon factories, in the

slate industry, in the lock industry of Aligargh, in the power-looms of Bhiwandi, in the restaurants and private houses. But let one more story tell its tale in full.

In the unrelenting heat of the Glass Bangle factories of Ferozabad, children carry molten glass to the oven for threading. The work requires speed and care: a small mistake will mean severe burn injuries and no work or pay till the child can come back fit for work; no medical expenses... Being exposed to 1300 degrees Celsius heat everyday can lead to cancer; it can also result in anaemia, retardation of growth, muscle cramps, respiratory ailments. Today 40,000 children below 14 years of age work in these factories. The children earn Rs 9/- to Rs 16/- a day, and are forced to work overtime without extra pay. It takes only three to four years to destroy their lungs. Their life-span is reduced to one third¹⁷.

Is not Patricia Palapatri right when she describes us, herself included, as "aiders and abettors in this crime against children?" "How much of child labour do we see? How much do we ignore? How much do we perpetrate?... And how much do we work at, to make this world a place where instead of being crushed to provide fragrance, the flowers of our future are given love, shelter, protection, caring and laughter?"¹⁸

Do you hear the children weeping,

O my brothers...

... the young, young children,

O my brothers,

They are weeping bitterly!

They are weeping in the playtime of the others!¹⁹

II

The Bible also retains stories and memories of cruelty to children. The references would roughly fall into three categories.

(1) The first would comprise the cruelty Israel practised and the vengeance they longed to take on their enemies, the children of their enemies not excluded. The total extermination of all living beings including children and women in the cities Israel conquered and placed under the "ban", such as Jericho, Ai, Lachish, Eglon, and Hazor (Joshua 6-11) would

each be a case in point. Were these stories originally accounts of Israel's conquest of Canaan? Was there ever such a conquest at all? Or were they originally accounts of pre-Israelite peasant revolts against overlords and tyrants, reinterpreted in imperialist terms of later years? This is a moot point we cannot discuss here²⁰. Equally heartless and unacceptable is the "prayer" or wish in Psalm 137, an expression of Israel's bitterness and frustration as days and years ground on in exile in Babylon.

Destructive Daughter of Babel,
a blessing on the man who treats you
as you have treated us.
A blessing on him who takes
and dashes your babies against the rock (Ps 137.8-9)

(2) The second type would consist of Yahweh's threats to wipe out whole cities and peoples including Israel and Judah. This is similar to the first category in that Yahweh is indicating the danger cities and peoples are in of being placed under the "ban" and of being totally annihilated. The important difference is that Yahweh's words are a prophetic commination meant to urge peoples and nations to conversion. See for instance the oracle on Babylon, threatening disaster:

All those caught are slaughtered,
All those captured fall by the sword;
Their babies are dashed to pieces before their eyes. (Jer 13:15-16).

Punishment for Israel's sin at Baal-Peor and its apostasy at Gilgal would be that in Ephraim there shall be

no giving birth, no pregnancy, no conceiving.
And if they rear sons I will take these from them
before they come to manhood.

Ephraim shall be cut down and his roots shall wither.

And if they bear children
I will kill the darlings of their womb (Hosea 9.10-16).

(3) A third group of passages laments the evil that overtakes children, and condemns every species of cruelty and neglect to which children are subjected. Through a story of rare power Abraham is re-educated and

wrenched from the fascination of traditional child-sacrifice performed to placate deities (?) like Molech (Gen 22). The practice of sacrificing children is explicitly forbidden, and the law is vindicated with extreme actions. "You must not hand over any of your children to have them passed to Molech" (lev. 18:21). If any son of Israel or any stranger were to do it, "the people must stone him...I myself shall turn my face against him" (Lev 20:2-5). "For Yahweh detests all this and hates..." (Deut 12:31; 18:10). Nevertheless the detestable practice found its way into Israel, especially among the ruling class. Hiel of Bethel slaughtered his two sons as a foundation sacrifice; Ahaz, king of Judah, caused his sons to pass through fire; and so did Manasse of Judah (1 Kings 16:34; 2 Kings 16:3; 21:6). Josiah however desecrated the furnace in the Valley of Ben-Hinnom so that no one should make his son or daughter pass through fire in honour of Molech (2 Kings 23:10). The practice is repeatedly rebuked in strong words. The pathos itself of the story of Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter and the annual lament over the incident by the daughters of Israel are enough condemnation of the deed (Judg 11:29-40). Leaders of Judah are reprov'd for "sacrificing children in the Wadis and in rocky clefts". The rebuke is repeated in Jeremiah: "they have built the high places of Topheth in the valley of Ben-Hinnom, to burn their sons and daughters: a thing I never commanded." (Isaiah 57:5; Jer 7:31; 19:5; 32:35) In Micah the worshipper, replying to Yahweh's complaints, proposes to offer sacrifices, among them "the giving of my first born" and "the fruit of my body". Yahweh emphatically rejects them, and demands justice, love and humility (Micah 6. 7-8).

For Ezekiel the children sacrificed are Yahweh's children. As victims of oppression they are particularly close to him. Hence note of anguish in his protest: "You have taken the sons and daughters you bore me and sacrificed them.. You have slaughtered my children and handed them over as a burnt offering (Ezek 16:20-22). Yahweh is deeply affected by the thought of Babylon's men being massacred, its babies dashed to pieces before their eyes, its baby boys cut to pieces and baby girls all crushed by enemies who

"have no mercy on the fruit of the womb,
no pity...for children" (Isaiah 43: 15:18).

Yahweh is moved at the sight of Israel's end

"When mothers fell, dashed to pieces, on their children";
and at the thought of the punishment Samaria must endure,
falling by the sword,

"their children dashed to pieces,
their pregnant women disembowelled";

and at the sight of Ninneveh's impending fate which would be
similar to that of Thebes which was forced into exile and
captivity and her little ones were dashed to pieces by the
armies of Assurbanipal in 663 B. C. (Nahum 3:10).

Yahweh will punish Ammon for his crimes, for disembowelling
the pregnant women of Gilead (Amos 1:13). Yahweh is concerned for

"the women of my people whom you (the tyrannical rich)
drive out
from the homes they loved;
their children you rob for ever
of the honour I gave them" (Micah 2. 9).

That anguish of God is shared by prophet Elisha who
wept at the vision of all the harm Hazael would do the Israel-
ites after he had killed Ben Hadad and usurped his throne:

"You will burn down their fortresses,
put their picked warriors to the sword
dash their children to pieces
and rip open their pregnant women" (2 Kings 8:7-13).

In brief the world of the Bible was as ungracious and
cruel to children as ours is. Yahweh laments the suffering
and destruction of children resulting from erring religions
or imperial aggressions which in their turn are interpreted
as punishment for prior injustice and idolatry. The over-
arching and consistent attitude of Yahweh is fierce opposition
to cruelty to human beings, to the small and the innocent in
particular; and deep tenderness and compassion for the weak
and the powerless. "Yahweh who does right is always on the
side of the oppressed." (Ps 103:6) This is a truth Israel has
gathered from centuries of experience with the ways of Yahweh.

The victimised and destroyed children are his children even more than they are their mothers'. No one, no child therefore need to feel that Yahweh has abandoned or forgotten her or him.

Does a woman forget her baby at the breast,
or fail to cherish the son of her womb?

Yet even if these forget

I will never forget you.

See, I have branded you on the palm of my hands...
(Isaiah 49:14-16).

For God is

Like a shepherd feeding his flock,

gathering lambs in his arms,

holding them against his breast

and leading to their rest the mother ewes (Isaiah 40: 11).

Hostility to children and attempts to hurt or slaughter them are presented in the Bible as the trade-mark of the satanic, the characteristic of regimes and attitudes mortally inimical to God and to human beings. The Pharaohs ordered the strangling of Israelite boys at birth; Herod sent out soldiers to kill boys below two years of age; the Nazis burned children indiscriminately; the U. S. oligarchs sent out bombers to incinerate everything in Hiroshima and Nagasaki (in chemically pure conditions) and everything in Vietnam. In all cases the struggle for liberation and for a transformation of the situation starts with resistance to royal commands and with caring for little ones. The Bible exhibits a remarkable partiality for the child, the younger son, the little people.

III

Is the fact theologically and spiritually significant that in the Bible divine election and blessing, rectitude and holiness, fall on or accompany the younger person in a family in preference to the elder ones? The fact surely is striking. "Eve conceived and gave birth to Cain... she gave birth to a second child, Abel, the brother of Cain" (Genesis 4:1-2). Now it was on Abel, the younger brother, and his offering that Yahweh looked with favour. Yahweh did not look with favour on Cain and his offering. The story gives the reason for this differ-

ential treatment on Yahweh's part. Cain was not doing right, while (it is implied) Abel was.

This is not always the case. In Noah's family it is the youngest son Ham/Canaan that is faulted with irreverence towards his drunken father and consequently cursed by him when he awoke from his stupor. Still there are enough cases of the younger being the chosen and privileged to justify the raising of the question concerning the significance of the phenomenon.

The case of Isaac has special import. He is Abraham's younger son. The elder child is Ishmael. When after Ishmael's birth God promised him a son from Sarah, Abraham laughed and said, "May Ishmael live in your presence". But God made it clear that, though he would bless Ishmael and make him into a great nation, it was with Isaac, yet to be born, that he (God) would maintain his covenant (Genesis 16:17 15-22). Isaac, not Ishmael, is the smile of God and the kindness of God. He makes his mother laugh (Gn 18:12; 21:6-9) while Ishmael, abandoned under a bush and crying for thirst in the shadow of death, makes his mother sad (21:14-21). God did hear the elder boy's cry, saved him, and promised him a great future. Still, "Isaac is the one through whom your (Abraham's) name will be carried on." Such is God's choosing (Gn 21:12).

No particular praise or reward is bestowed on Abraham for giving up his eldest son at the command of Yahweh (and Sarah). Sarah said:

Drive away that slave girl and her son... This greatly distressed Abraham... but God said to him... Grant Sarah all she asks of you... Rising early next morning Abraham took some bread and a skin of water and giving them to Hagar, he put the child on her shoulder and sent her away (Gen 21:9-14).

But Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his younger son is celebrated and fussed over.

I swear by my own self, Yahweh declares, that because you have done this, because you have not refused me your own beloved son, I will shower blessings on you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in heaven and the grains of sand on the sea shore (Gen 22:15-18).

Even more telling is the position of advantage Jacob is accorded over his elder brother Esau. It is a story of fraudulent usurpation of the rights of the first-born. In ancient Israelite society primogeniture was a widespread institution with legal, social and religious features. "Biblical legislation gave the first-born male a special status with respect to inheritance rights and certain cultic regulations."²¹ The first-born son was to be acknowledged as principal heir with right to a double portion of his father's estate. In addition to this the status of first-born carried certain duties and privileges. He was also sacred to God, and had to be redeemed. In the story before us we are witnessing the disregard of primogeniture in the clan of Abraham. The suggestion has been made that "the son most suited to carry on the line of Abraham -- with its attendant responsibility for transmitting the clan's unique religious belief -- was acknowledged as the head of the family, even if it meant passing by the first-born; indeed even if it entailed banishing him from the household"²². But if this was a received principle in the tribe, how is it that the "suited" son, the younger one, finds himself banished from home? Why all the trickery surrounding the choice? And why is it that so often in the biblical narrative the younger son, and not the elder one, is found to be "suited to carry on the line"? We need to probe further.

Rebecca conceived twin. When the children struggled in her womb she consulted Yahweh, and was told she was carrying two rival nations. "The elder will serve the younger", said Yahweh (Gen 25:23). That the father preferred the first-born and the mother the younger child is perhaps understandable, but why this preference on God's part? That question grows sharper as we watch young Jacob's cunning taking advantage of his elder brother's fatigue and need, and swindling him of his birth-right with a bowl of lentil stew. The question begins to burn as we watch the younger's consummate fraud using a deliberate lie (Augustine: mystery!) with which to wrest from his father the blessing due to the first-born -- a blessing bound up with the right of inheritance (Gen 27). Lie, fraud and greed combine; the mother is party to it all; and God is fond of the boy. In what sense is this boy the fitter member to continue the Abrahamic line and

life-style? When Jacob returns after his Haran sojourn, he is afraid of Esau, suspicious that Esau would avenge the injury he had done to him. But Esau proves to be made of far finer stuff. "Esau ran to meet him, took him in his arms and held him close and wept." "He was humble enough to accept Jacob's gifts though he was prosperous and had plenty." (Gen 33:1-11)

Jacob's preference for Rachel, the younger of his uncle's daughters may be a reflection of God's favouring of the younger of the two brothers. Or it may just be natural for "Rachel was shapely and beautiful"; but then "Leah had lovely eyes" (Gen 29:17). The choices tally, and Jacob's special love for Rachel culminates in the birth of Joseph. Joseph is the youngest but one of Jacob's twelve sons from four women, and Joseph is a boy of providence and destiny. Not only was he, the child of his father's old age, his father's favourite, but was favoured by God with dreams that presaged the future and (later) with the ability to read and interpret dreams. He proved to be saviour of the very brothers who had sought to destroy him. He is straight and upright throughout unlike the Putiphar's wife, unlike his own brothers, utterly unlike his own father Jacob. This is not contradicted by the hide and seek he played with his brothers when they came to his Egypt; that is the narrator's way of heightening the drama and pressing home to his brothers the reality of their injustice as a prelude to repentance. "Yahweh was with Joseph and everything Joseph undertook was successful. Yahweh blessed the Egyptian's household out of consideration for Joseph."

The Joseph story, exceptionally rich in the theme of favouring the younger person comes to a climax in the scene where Jacob blesses Joseph's children Manasse and Ephraim. Jacob laid his right hand on the younger boy Ephraim, and would not alter the gesture despite Joseph's protest: "Not like that, father. This one is the elder; put your right hand on his head." But Jacob refused. "I know, my son, I know. He too shall become a people; he too will be great. But his younger brother will be greater." (Gen 48:8-20)

Here the Ishmael-Isaac story is repeating itself almost verbatim. The Genesis narrative is replete with modified versions of the story. The last story proves that the theme

of favouring the younger is being consciously developed. It has religious import. What could its meaning be?

Before suggesting an answer we would do well to review the theme in the rest of the Bible. Amram and Jochobed had three children: Miriam possibly the eldest, Aaron the second and Moses the youngest. It is this youth three years younger than Aaron and slower of speech that God calls and commissions to be the historical liberator and leader of his people at the time of slavery in Egypt (Exod 4:14; 6:20; 7:7; Numb 26:59; 1 Chron 5:29). Data about Miriam is sparse; data about Aaron is fragmentary and scanty. Aaron is assigned a subordinate role: he plays no part in the events immediately attending Israel's escape from Egypt. At the revelation at Sinai Aaron is a minor participant, and he is absent when the portable sanctuary is constructed. On the other hand he is shown as playing a major role in the sin of calf-worship, though there is also a strand of narrative which seeks to attenuate his guilt. The fact that Aaron and Moses are often together addressed by God does point to some pre-eminence in leadership which Aaron held with his brother. Nevertheless his younger brother Moses is the towering personality in every scene of the Exodus drama²³. He is in fact incomparable in the whole galaxy of great men and women enshrined in the Bible stories. We are centering our attention for the moment on the fact that Moses is the youngest in the family, and we are asking why he should be chosen in preference to his brother or other better equipped, persons more eloquent and less violent for the great task of Israel's liberation.

Samuel the prophet played a role in the history of Israel next only to that played by Moses. This seer was judge and liberator, king-maker and constitution-maker. He tried, with limited success though, to steer Israel in an hour of strife and crisis, through a period of transition from egalitarian tribal traditions to monarchic set-up with centralised government, a standing army, rich merchants, mounting exploitation, and restrictions on people's participation and freedom (1 Sam 8). It may be Israel's awareness of this fact that led them to view and present Samuel's birth as special (1 Sam 1 and 2). Samuel was Hanna's first and probably only child, but he was younger to, if not the youngest of, many sisters and brothers, Elkana's

children from his other wife Peninnah. Samuel's youth is not emphasised as in the case of Jacob and Ephraim, but its spiritual and theological meaning is intimated in the song or prayer Hannah sang when she made her child over to Yahweh (I Sam 2). To that song we shall turn later. The meaning is also suggested, quite powerfully, in the call and mission of little Samuel to be prophet conveying to old Eli God's judgement on his house. The old priest and his unruly brood are not directly addressed. Yahweh prefers to communicate with and through a little boy.

God chooses Saul to be Israel's first monarch and directs Samuel to anoint him. Samuel accosts Saul with a mystifying word about all Israel's wealth as destined for Saul and his father's house. Saul's reply underscores the insignificance and smallness of his own family and tribe. A word of personal modesty, to be sure. But does it not have deeper resonances in the context of the kind of divine elections we are contemplating?

After Saul's rejection by Yahweh Samuel was instructed to consecrate as king one of the many sons of Jesse of Bethlehem, whom Yahweh would eventually indicate to the seer. Jesse presented seven sons of his, but Samuel was told that none of them was Yahweh's choice. When the eldest of them all, Eliab, of good appearance and great stature, stood before him, Samuel thought he was the man. But Yahweh said to Samuel, "Take no notice of his appearance or his height... God does not see as man sees; man looks at appearances but Yahweh looks at the heart". (I Sam 16:7) Samuel asked, "Are these all the sons you have?" Jesse replied, "There is still one left, the youngest; he is out looking after the sheep". The man did not consider the boy worth counting for the purpose of meeting with the seer. But God did count David. And this "boy of fresh complexion, with fine eyes and pleasant bearing" was anointed king. One more instance of deliberate choice of the younger person, of the least experienced, one whom his own father did not remember to reckon till he was questioned.

The fact of David's youth and inexperience receives extra emphasis in the story of the defeat of Goliath and the Philis-

tines. Two hostile armies drew up their battle lines on the hills on either side of the valley of Terebinth. A Philistine shock-trooper named Goliath, a fully armed and armoured giant of a man challenged Israel to single combat. No one dared face him; dismayed, Israel's army shrank from him. But not David. David was no soldier; he came to the camp at his father's bidding to bring provisions for his soldier brothers. The three eldest of Jesse's sons were in Saul's army. Eliab, the eldest of all rebuked David for coming to the camp; he would not care to listen to what David had to say. Morning and evening for forty days Goliath took his stand challenging Israel. David offered to fight the man and uphold Israel's honour. Saul said to him: "You are only a boy, and he (Goliath) has been a warrior from his youth." David insisted on an encounter. Saul yielded but he made the boy put on Saul's armour and helmet and sword. These were an encumbrance and David took them off, and advanced with a stick, stones and his sling.

The Philistine looked at David and what he saw filled him with scorn, because David was only a youth, a boy of fresh complexion and pleasant bearing (I Sam 17).

David's sling and stone slew the armoured warrior. The meaning of the election of the boy and the significance of the contrast painted in strong colours between the boy and his sling on the one hand and the king, the elder brothers, the army, the giant and their armour and weapons on the other hand are enshrined in David's reply to the giant. This too we shall take up in a later section of the study.

When the heart of Ahaz and his people shuddered at the approach of Aram's menacing army, God seeks through Isaiah to save and sustain Ahaz' faith, courage and hope by offering him a sign of safety and reassurance. And the sign is a child. Its coming to birth and growing up in prosperous and peaceful circumstances would signify that God is with the people. That is why the child is to be named Immanuel. The sign of peace and security, of defence against invading armies is not the King, not the generals, not the men of learning and skill. In right authentic biblical fashion, the sign is a child. "There is a child born for us, and a son given us";

his birth means light for those who live in a land of deep shadows cast by threat of war and destruction; it means the burning up of all the gear and tackle of battle, as well as the feeding together of calf and lion cub, "with a little boy to lead them", and the elimination of harm "on all my holy mountain" (Isaiah 7; 9; 11).

The story continues. When Nebuchadnezzar would have his dream and its meaning told to him, the diviners, magicians and enchanter fail. The terrible and arrogant monarch is in distress. Then it is a young boy whom God enables to reveal the mystery of the dream. Daniel stands in the direct line of Joseph, and, analogically, of Samuel and David.

In the same tradition the New Testament stands the Infant Jesus, small, weak and powerless, over against Herod the King, mighty and formidable in arms, in wealth, in cruelty and crime, great in evil (Mt 2). The theme is sustained in all the scenes of contrast and confrontation between Jesus and his little flock on the one side and the powerful on the other side, like the guardians of the law, the rich landowners and merchants, the high priests Annas and Caiphas, King Herod, and Pilate the Emperor's man in the colony.

IV

Preference for the younger child, for the child, for the young is a theme running throughout the Bible. Its meaning seems to emerge at the point where the many stories converge. The stories together disclose and demonstrate (1) God's regard and partiality for the small, the powerless, the lowly, the "nothings" of this world; and thus (2) the contrast, the opposition, between the reign of God on this earth and the domination of satanic forces; and (3) God's disregard for and critical rejection of the values and ways, standards and priorities of conventional societies and religions; and (4) God's freedom of choice and action, breaking through our rules and views.

It may be safely affirmed that the theme has its origin in the foundational experience which started and defined Israel: the experience of liberation by divine intervention from bondage in Egypt. The theme has its source in Israel's abiding awareness at once of its smallness and insignificance and of its

election and mission. Israel knew well that if Yahweh set his heart on them and chose them, it was not because they were more numerous, gifted, virtuous or spiritual than other peoples.

You were the least of all peoples. It was for love of you and to keep the oath he swore to your fathers that Yahweh brought you out... and redeemed you from the house of slavery (Deut 7:7-9).

Indeed "When Israel was a child I loved him

and I called my son out of Egypt...

I myself taught Ephraim to walk,

I took them in my arms...

I led them with reins of kindness...

I was like someone who lifts an infant close against his cheek; stooping down to him I gave him his food" (Hosea 11:1-4).

The theme is Yahweh's graciousness caring for little ones with no credits.

In Ezekiel the metaphor changes, and the relationship between Yahweh and Israel is set in a different key not unknown to Hosea. The story is pathetic and beautiful.

The lord Yahweh says this... At birth, the very day you were born, there was no one to cut your navel-string, or wash you in cleansing water, or rub you with salt, or wrap you in napkins. No one leaned kindly over you to do anything like that for you. You were exposed in the open fields; you were as unloved as that on the day you were born. I saw you struggling in your blood as I was passing, and I said to you as you lay in your blood: Live, and grow like the grass of the fields. You developed, you grew... Then I saw you as I was passing. Your time had come, the time for love. I spread part of my cloak over you and covered your nakedness; I bound myself by oath, I made a covenant with you...

The story proceeds to describe the costly and precious garments, and silks, and gems and jewels and diadem with which Yahweh adorned and enriched this foundling as she grew. It recounts how he fostered and nourished her till she became surpassingly beautiful, queenly and famous, "because

I had clothed you with my own splendour" (Ezek 16:2-14). Israel is at first a picture of the neglect, destitution and misery to which millions of children are born and in which they decay and crawl towards death and the grace. It is where they linger that God loves to walk bidding them live and grow, working with us and through us to feed and clothe and love and honour them, and to put them on their feet on the road of human history. It is where the children waste away under oppression that God chooses to pass in order to denounce and destroy anti-children forces, economic and political, which say to the little ones and the poor: Die.

All three passages witness to the truth that the small and the powerless, the unwanted and the oppressed are precious in God's sight. For them he makes himself responsible. "Does a woman forget her baby at the breast?" Even if she does, "I will never forget you", my children, my street and working and starving and disintegrating children, says the Lord Yahweh. She who is more mother than all mothers together. The song that Samuel's mother sang when she was making over her son, a younger child in her husband's family, to Yahweh interprets the meaning of the bias for the lesser people that the Bible regularly shows. After decriing haughty words and arrogant behaviour Hannah sings of how

The bow of the mighty is broken,
but the feeble have girded themselves with strength.
The sated hire themselves out for bread
but the famished cease from labour.

For Yahweh "raises the poor from the dust", and "lifts the needy from the dunghill" (I Sam 2:1-10). Centuries later this song of the hope of the poor would be echoed by Mary of Nazareth. The two women share the same insight into the mystery before God of the lowly and the small people (Luke 1:46-56).

Mordecai's dream points in the same direction:

The righteous nation was thrown into consternation at the fear of the evils awaiting them, and prepared for death, crying out to God. Then from their cry, as from a little spring, there grew a great river... Light came as the sun

rose, and the humble were raised up and devoured the mighty. (Esther 1:9-11)

A striking illustration of the humble devouring the mighty is seen in David's encounter with Goliath. The narrator makes David himself disclose the meaning of the scene in which he, a handsome boy, was the chosen actor and Israel's liberator.

You have come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of Yahweh. Know that it is not by sword or by spear that Yahweh gives victory (I Sam 17:40-47).

To the same cluster of symbols belongs the contrast between Pharaoh and the children he has condemned to death, or between Herod and the child(ren) he seeks to slaughter. The one is great in wealth and weapon and the will to kill; the other is poor and powerless, and has to hide and flee to remain alive. The one is a symbol of Satan who is a murderer from the beginning while the other signifies God's reign of love and abundant life.

Paul would later pick up this biblical theme and show how God shames the influential, the noble-born and the learned by choosing "those whom the world thinks common and contemptible"; "those who are nothing at all", those who are weak and foolish by human reckoning (I Cor 1:26-29). "God does not see as man sees." (I Sam 16:6-7) God subverts our social, religious and axiological hierarchies. What is last and worthless in our eyes may be first and precious before him. It is by serving the lowly and caring for the neglected children and bringing them honour that we can partake of God's truth and become his disciples.

Israel is God's child. "You are my son, today I have become your father." (Ps 7:7; Exod 4:22; Deut 14:1; Hos 11:1) Children of Israel are the sons God has reared (Isaiah 1:2). If they sin they become Not-my-People, but through conversion they become My-People again (Hos 1:9-10). Like a father, like a mother God will gather his children and comfort them:

See, I will bring them back from the land of the North;
all of them, the blind and the lame,
women with child and women in labour.....

They had left in tears, I will comfort them as I lead them back....

I am a father to Israel..

God means to gather all his scattered and deprived and dispossessed children. His purpose is to make them feel and flourish "like a watered garden" (Jer 31:8-12). God orders the North and the South to

Bring back my sons from far away,
my daughters from the ends of the earth

where they have been exiled and oppressed, unsheltered and under-nourished and forced into hard, unpaid or underpaid work. Those dispossessed by the economy and unchurched by orthodoxy are to remember that God is greater than orthodoxy and our economic system.

Do not let your compassion go unmoved,
for you are our father.

For Abraham does not own us
and Israel does not acknowledge us.

You, Yahweh, yourself are our father,
our redeemer is your ancient name. (Isaiah 63:16)

Yahweh is also Israel's mother who cannot forget her children even if all mothers should cease to care for their infants (Isaiah 49:15; see Deut 32:11 and Mtt 23:37; Ps 17:8; 91:4). Yahweh's altars are a home for the sparrow, a nest for the swallow's young: Yahweh is a nest for the small and the weak, a place of refuge and safety (Ps 84:3).

God is not only parent but child — child in his/her identification with the shelterless and the dispossessed, in his/her solidarity with the victims of unjust and exploitative systems. Israel's experience that "Yahweh who does what is right is always on the side of the oppressed" (Ps 103:6) is a telling and terse expression of Yahweh's elected littleness. Jesus has told us that it is the joy of God to share divine truth and mystery not with the learned and the clever, nor with presidents and generals, but with little ones and mere children (Mt 11:25). The child is a particularly beautiful revelation of God. It says: God is (like) a child — always fresh; always growing in wonder and wonderfulness; growing in love and

lovableness; never decaying or aging. Myths express this by saying that in God's realm all the gods are young and human beings are going on sweet seventeen. It is God's eternal youth that seeks endless expression in fresh mornings, in new blossoms, in young faces, and in Mary's child. God's childhood longs to bloom in the limbs of street and working children, to sparkle in the eyes of children who fall asleep hungry every night, to sing in children's cries of protest. It is the child-like freshness of God that Genesis one represents. God is imaginative and inventive without end. What a marvel of a universe God thinks up: of colours and sounds, of shapes and movements, of attractions and affinities and radiations, of gyrations and evolutions, of fragrances and smiles, of persons with distinctive faces and thoughts, each unique yet interlaced and woven into one another, creating and making much of one another. No wonder: love is rich in fantasy, and God is young love. And having made each separate marvel God (clapped his hands? and) said: it is good, it is very good, it is admirable.

God has a child's capacity for wonder, for delight in simple things (which in fact are extremely complex) and in things common (which in truth are extraordinary and uncommon and unique, being children of God's will and word) like light, water, air, earth, trees, grass, crows and people. All this is God's *leela*, play, sport, dance, the exuberance of God's freedom and joy and life and loveliness. God never tires of it. God never tires of repeating the same. What we call repetition is not repetition to the child. To him each is a new move, a new sun, a new dawn, a new growth, a new step forward, a fresh level of life. So God does it again and again. To the moon and the fruit-trees God says, Do it again, and they do. Do it again, we say to God, and the fields bring forth grain and rice season after season, and God touches (ever so gently) the buds into blossoms. God does it for the joy of doing it, for the ecstasy of creativity and the joy of sharing what God has and is.

Child-like, God is a trusting God. He trusts us with freedom, with his earth and its future, with his sons and daughters and friends, and with his own history on this earth. It is total trust. God trusts himself to us, and places in our

hearts and hands the destiny of his reign, of values like justice, peace and freedom in terms of which we image him to ourselves. God is in our hearts and in the bosom of history like a child in mother's arms. God's life on our earth, God's name, growth and destiny on this earth depend on us. We can make God's name holy on earth, and meaningful; or meaningless and unholy. We can, if we are evil and ungrateful, smother God's reality in history and do him to death even Herods and Pharaohs have sought to do, and Caiphas and Pilate have done.

For, like the child, God is vulnerable. Pharaoh plans to abolish God by abolishing children. The midwives saved not only the children; they saved God for our world by their rebellion and dissent. Mary did likewise. Had there been only Pharaohs, Herods and Cains on this earth and killers and torturers of children, and no seekers and symbols of justice and freedom, would not God be absent too? With the dying children and in their death and in the death of justice and freedom would not God die too? The death of God proclaimed by the West stands in direct logical sequence to the death of children and of their mothers and fathers by the million practised by the West's imperial conquests, colonial domination and capitalist exploitation. God is vulnerable in the children of the earth; God is vulnerable in his little ones.

Children are the future of the race and the earth's forward thrust. They live not on the memory of the past, but on the memory of the future. They are the memory of the future. Like them God looks forward and to the future. God does not keep count of wrongs done, nor fix on frustrations of yesterday, but holds alive in his heart all the promises in ours, so tomorrow they can come to flower and fruit. It is an old dehumanising religion, alienated from God that fixes its gaze exclusively on a woman's past and on dated laws in a cold book, follows its mechanism and automatically serves her death. God's religion looks to what the woman can yet become, sees the saint that can yet crystallise in her, lays aside dead facts and laws of the past and, responding to the future, offers her life (John 8:1-11). God is the God of hope and of the yet-to-be, of which children are the promiscuous buds and sacred signs. To damage them is to damage human hope and to distort the face of God.

God is child-like also in this that God gives, and to his/her giving there is no end. God is not miserly or tight-fisted; the earth and the sky bear ample witness to that. God is generous and prodigal, and never hoards; he is not anxious for the morrow. What God gives ultimately is God's own Self. Creation is a beginning of that gift. When God so loves the world as to give his only Son, a critical point is reached in the Self-giving of God. It comes to final culmination in the outpouring of the Spirit. With that we begin to live by the breath of God and history starts to ferment by the energy of the Divine. It is thus history and we become God's children, and learn to cry the joyful cry, Father, Mother. On the cross Jesus places his spirit (breath, life) in the father's hands. At Pentecost God commits his spirit to us as a child entrusts his life to his mother.

He/She who is our father/mother is also our child. In our history we give birth to God. God is alive in time and acts at the level of history only in the measure we bring him forth by living the realities and the values which image God for us. God is always coming to us by coming to birth from the womb of Mary, from the womb of Israel, from the womb of history, from the womb of the earth, from the womb of liberation praxis and struggles for justice. Jesus is careful to remind us that we have a call to become his and God's mother. "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked.

And looking around at those sitting in a circle about him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who does the will of God, that person is my brother and sister and mother' (Mark 3: 31-35).

The will of God is life for all; life and love for the neighbour in need, for the neglected sister and brother, for the street and working children, for the children who have no shelter, no food, no friends, no security, no future. To care for them and befriend them and to get structures of wealth and power changed in their favour is to do God's will and to become God's and Christ's mother and give birth to the Divine in history.

V

"The growing child is the most important being in the

world...Realize it and work to nurture the flowers of the future.”²⁴

There shall be peace on earth;
but not until each child shall daily eat his fill;
go warmly clad against the winter-wind,
and learn his lessons with a tranquil mind...
and thus released from hunger, fear and need,
regardless of his colour, race or creed,
look upwards smiling to the skies,
his faith in man reflected in his eyes²⁵.

In 1939 German troops invaded Poland, leaving more than 1000 children orphaned. The children were sent to India by steamer. They landed at Bedi port in Jamnagar in November 1939, Maharaja Jam Saheb Digvijayasinghji Jadeja provided shelter for these children, establishing a camp. After the war the children were safely returned to their motherland. These, by then adults, formed the Indo-Polish Friendship Society and an organisation Jamnagari Sons Club. On 16th of April 1989 a bronze replica of the camp was unveiled near Balachadi village, 30 kilometres from Jamnagar by Poland's Vice-President Dr Tadeusz Szelachowsky. Could we not pick up this thread and continue the tradition, and return all our deprived and exploited children to the motherland of their rightful heritage? Or, shall we do such things only for foreign children and under colonial conditions?

We are guilty of many errors and many faults,
but our worst crime is abandoning the children,
neglecting the fountain of life.

Many of the things we need can wait.

The child cannot.

Right now is the time his bones are being formed,
his blood is being made
and his senses are being developed.

To him we cannot answer “Tomorrow”,
His name is “Today”²⁶.

Therefore,

whoever it is
that leaves him
out so late

when other
 creatures have gone
 to stall and bin
 ought to be told to
 come and take him in. (Robert Frost)

Till the child is taken in, she will cry. From her cry, as from a fountain, a river will flow, and swell to a flood. And the flood will drown our cities and civilisations and our pretences (Esther 1:9-11).

Or, the child will laugh. Her laughter will be the most devastating flood and fire for the undoing of established hypocrisies. Have we heard (of) the laughter of the child?

A king married a beautiful woman and was taking his bride home to his palace. They had to pass through a forest. Half way through the forest they were confronted by a Brahmin demon whose hair was flames, whose mouth was a foul furnace of smoke and stench, and whose sacred thread was human entrails. In his right hand was a chunk of rotting human flesh from which he took deep bites that he munched with relish. In his left hand was a skull full of hot human blood which he quaffed with gusto. In horrid gutturals like a crack of thunder he brayed his intention to eat the queen and the king there and then. The king, terror-stricken, prayed and craved to be spared. At last the demon relented. He would let the couple go on condition that within seven days the king would bring him a seven year old boy for his breakfast. The boy's father should hold him by the feet, his mother should secure his arms, and king should with his sword cut out the boy's heart for the demon to relish. The promise was made. In the palace the distressed king consulted his ministers. Their advice was to have a statue of a seven-year old boy made of pure gold and adorned with the rarest jewels and precious stones and taken round the cities and villages with the proclamation that the statue with all the ornaments would be the reward of any parent offering his boy to be sacrificed for the king. People were sad, puzzled, horrified. A seven year old boy saw it all, heard it all. He offered himself. His parents, after much reluctance and hesitation, agreed. The boy told them that now their poverty would end. He was taken to the forest.

His father held him by the feet. His mother secured his hands. The king drew his sword. The demon stood drooling, in anticipated relish of the young heart. Then the boy looked at them and smiled. The smile developed into laughter. The laughter kept growing longer and louder. The parents let go, the king dropped his sword. The demon trembled. All of them bowed profoundly with hands joined above their heads. The boy continued to laugh²⁷.

The child's laughter continues. It is exposing and holding up for merciless scrutiny parents and educators and their claims to genuine concern and disinterested love; kings and governments and their pretences to peoples' life and promoting their welfare: and brahmins and religions and their idle propaganda concerning spirituality and liberation. Greed and gold and love of life and pleasure continue to rule them. These combine to destroy children under cover of feigned sacredness of family, government and religiosity.

Do we hear the laughter of India's children? Can we hear their cry ?

Vidya Jyoti
Delhi

Samuel Rayan

Footnotes

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- 3) Modhumita Mojumdar: Girl Child is Barely Tolerated. in *The Statesman*, March 22, 1989
- 4) G. S. Chadha, in *Indian Express*, April 3, 1989.
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- 5) *Indian Express*, March, 7, 1989
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 - 12) ILO Information: Save the working children. ILO I, 24/3, August 1988
 - 13) Patricia Palaparti: Where flowers are crushed for their fragrance. *Health Action*, February 1989 P. 43
 - 14) *id.*, *ibid.*
 - 15) *ib.*, *ibid.* P. 44
 - 16) *id.*, *ibid.*, P. 45
 - 17) *id.*, *ibid.*
 - 18) *id.*, *ibid.*
 - 19) Courtesy: *Health Action*, February 1989
 - 20) See Norman Gottwald: *Tribes of Yahweh* 1978
 - 21) *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 6: First-born
 - 22) *ibid.*
 - 23) *ibid.* 2: Aaron: 12: Miriam and Moses
 - 24) John Vattamattam, *Health Action*, February 1989, P. 2
 - 25) Dorothy Roight: The Children's Charter, quoted by Patricia Palaparti, in *Health Action*, February 1989, p. 43
 - 26) Gabriela Mistral, poet of Chile. Courtesy *Health Action*, February '89

The other Face of India

I. Street Children

You will find them everywhere.

The little boy who cleans your car at the traffic light, the chaiwallah (tea-boy) who breezes into your office morning and evening, serves tea to the workers at construction sites, caters to customers in the roadside hotels, not yet in his teens; the unlicensed, adolescent coolie at the railway station puffing at his cigarette, or the aspiring young musician who warbles the latest film hit to the accompaniment of two stones or tin can.

But too often, we forget that they are children, entitled to square meals, to play, to dream, and to hope.

We are not alone.

The law treats them as a problem, to be banished to children's reformatory homes, prison like institutions, which incarcerate them till they are eighteen, by which time they are misfits to our normal world — condemned to a life time of being different, of being the product of a society that turns a blind eye to their existence.

These children function in the unorganised or informal service sector in every growing city, catering to the various needs of city dwellers, offering cheap labour and always open to exploitation by whoever who is not sensitive to their struggles. These are children who have lost their childhood long time back even if the chronological age is only 8. They have already assumed the responsibilities of adults on their tiny shoulders, before their age and are involved in struggle for survival and challenges for a decent living.

Street children are in various activities: selling newspapers, serving tea in roadside hotels, polishing shoes in shop-

ping and commercial centres, working in small factories and automobile workshops. Many are seen begging around places of worship. In middle and high income residential areas, they work as domestic servants, vegetable sellers, milk carriers, car cleaners and dhobies (washermen). Involved in a host of occupations unsuited to their tender minds and bodies. Thousands of anguished little children from poverty stricken rural areas, kicked and beaten by their parents for "doing nothing" to earn their living, flee their homes, only to enter another world of cruelty and deceit; in the numerous roadside hotels and restaurants of the city.

They travel alone, with the little money they have stolen or saved up, and stray into city railway stations where they loiter about in search of work, ragged, hungry and broke. Hawk-eyed "agents" on the look out for cheap hands, pick them up, promise them good jobs and hand them over to the small hotel owners for a "commission" of a meagre sum on each boy. They are frequently duped: it is a miserable existence; many of the children are hardly ever paid their dues, and some not paid at all; they are given two meals of dry rotties (bread) and sabji (vegetable) a day if they are lucky, and sleep on the pavements outside their working places, or on the cold, hard floor. Some are sexually assaulted by their owners or the older employees. Absence from work or glasses broken invite loud abuses and often violence. The owners spare no one. And the children suffer in silence, if not in the hope of getting paid some day, at least for the food they can never hope to get at home. Those who cannot bear the hardships return to their homes as they came — hopeless and broke.

Street children – an urban phenomenon

Street children is a growing phenomenon of modern times when urban centres in developing countries are faced with processes of rapid and unplanned urbanisation. Pressures of rural poverty contribute to increasing tide of rural to urban migration sending millions of families to the metropolis in search of new hope and a share in the city's prosperity. These migrants add on to the population of the urban poor who are assigned to the ever growing numbers of slum dwellers. In such circumstances, children of the urban poor too often find

themselves active participants in the survival of the whole family. If the family cannot hold together, they seek survival by themselves – in the street.

The problem of street children is a global one which concerns all. It is more emphasized in the cities of developing countries. The number seems to be on the rise as countries become more and more urbanised. Big cities like Bombay, Calcutta, Bangkok, Karachi, Rio de Janeiro etc. spell a challenge to those who care to be concerned with street children. In some countries the Governments have recognised this problem and are responding with various programme approaches. There are a few other countries, where the problem still remains to be taken up seriously and much remains to be done for providing basic services to these children. India is one among these.

How many street children are there? Some estimates of the numbers of street children in both developing and industrialised countries today are as high as 80 million, with approximately one-half in Latin America. However, to date no satisfactory means of determining the global numbers has been developed. Anti-slavery Society, U. K. estimates that there are about 31 million street children. There have been no studies done specially on street children in India. However, it is a study done by Panicker and Wangia of Street and Working children in C. I. T. of Delhi, it has been estimated that there are approximately 100,000 street children in Delhi and approximately 11 million in India.

Street children – who are they?

The term denotes a place of congregation, but also a certain set of working and living conditions. The vast majority are on the street to make a living for their families and/or themselves. The returns may be paltry, and may be in kind rather than in cash, for these children the street is above all a work place. Second, they spend large amount of time on the street, frequently because of the low returns on their labour. Third, most make their way in the informal sector as petty hawkers, shoe-shine boys, scavengers of raw material or even thieves and street prostitutes. Fourth, by the nature of their work and life, they are normally on their own, largely unprotected

by adults. For that reason, above all others, they are vulnerable to many dangers and abuses, and they tend to receive few services essential to their protection and development. Relatively, few attend school or receive health care.

In the context of understanding street children for programming purposes, a working definition of street children could be: "Street Children are those for whom the street (in the widest sense of the word, i. e., unoccupied dwellings, waste-land, etc.) more than their family has become their real home, a situation in which there is no protection, supervision or direction from responsible adults." Attempts have been made to establish categories among street children in order to try to elaborate various strategies for responding to their various needs. Three major categories have been identified:

Children on the Street

By far the largest of the three categories and consist primarily of working children who still have family connections of a more or less regular nature. Their focus in life is still the home. A very few attend school. Most return home at the end of each working day and most will have a sense of belonging to the local community in which their home is situated.

Children of the Street

The second group is smaller but more complex. Children in this group see the *street as their home* and it is there that they seek shelter, food and essence of family among companions. Family ties exist but are remote and their former home is visited infrequently.

Abandoned Children

This third group may appear to form a part of the second group and in daily activities are practically indistinguishable. However, by virtue of having severed all ties with the biological family, they are entirely on their own, not just for material but also for psychological survival and therefore require a different approach. It is important to stress that these children are not necessarily boys. Girls may not be as visible in the everyday street life, but they are there in great numbers and increasingly so. Any serious attempt to

deal with the issue must therefore take this basic fact into account.

Essentially what is sought for abandoned children is a new family of some kind often in a substitute form. For children of the street, a strengthening of their link with the family is the priority or if this is not possible, a substitute family. For the children on the street, a preventive action is needed to keep them from becoming children of the street or completely abandoned. Such preventive initiatives must see the child as a member of a family, which in turn is part of a community - with direct contact at all levels. Such programme interventions must also seek not to take away the child's work but to give it as well as the child a new dignity. Work need not be damaging, exploitative and abusive if it is made appropriate to child's age and development, adaptable to educational and recreational opportunities, accessible for health and nutritional services and directed towards training for a happy and useful future, which of course includes remunerative employment.

Causes of child abandonment - street children

The principal causes of child abandonment -- and in many cases of child neglect, abuse and exploitation -- are certainly related directly to the rapid advance of industrial growth and the persistence of rural and urban poverty. The cycle, for the family, is usually migration to the city, profound urban slum poverty, and family disintegration beginning first with the abandonment of the family by the father. Subsequent consequences are the pressures on the deserted women, dependency of abandoned mothers on serial male partnerships and the rejection of these mother's children by the so-called step-fathers. Violence is common in the lives of children whose families are trying to survive under any or all these conditions, and is a principal reason for children fleeing their home in favour of the streets.

If a child is left to the streets and cannot subsist on earnings from working or begging, then he or she must turn to other means for his or her survival, among these means are thefts, acts of violence, and prostitution. Exposure to the vicious circle of the street leads to an expert education in the

art of survival and a growing anti-social stance fostered by the resentment and distrust of the society that has rejected him or her.

Quite a few children take to drugs and other vices. But as serious as this particular problem may be, it is obvious that the very deep problems within family and community must be solved before life will become worthwhile enough for these children not to seek out drugs or other similar addictions to relieve the burden of the horrible reality of their lives.

The challenge

Because of the growing numbers and the special characteristics and needs of street children, simple programme responses cannot take them out of the streets and the market places. The income brought in by a child worker may make the difference between a family remaining together as a unit or not. If the family does fall apart, the child and his brothers and sisters are likely to slide into complete abandonment.

Although the situation of street children is very serious indeed, there is nevertheless hope of seeing real change provided efforts are initiated early. In countries like Brazil, Colombia and Mexico, small modest programme interventions begun few years back have now developed into national movements. Many countries (especially developing) have yet to see the challenge. Therefore, efforts need to be made to create awareness in the government and the public so that these children on the street and of the street are seen and their problems understood and responses developed.

We need to make serious efforts and think of ways and means of reaching out effectively to these groups of children. It is important to note that the lives and situation of these children could defy our traditional responses to destitute and abandoned children. Hence, we ought to be guided, not so much with the approach of replication, but rather identifying and developing innovative programme approaches suitable to and relevant to the lives of these children. No matter how good institutions may be, institutionalization of street children must always be the last resort and then only for those to whom no other options are open. Child institutionalization often creates

more problems than it resolves and the problems of deprived and street children must be solved at their roots.

Needless to say, prevention should essentially be emphasized over cure even in the context of street children. Programmes need to be developed and the existing welfare and developmental interventions need to be adapted so that problems of economically and socially vulnerable families are addressed by these. Assistance and services must be provided to "at risk" families, who if not helped will result in disintegration consequently resulting in destitution of their children.

Simultaneously, however, the children on the street have to be served and helped so that they have adequate access to all the basic services considered necessary for healthy growth and development.

Generally, the first ones to respond to the problems of street children are the NGO's. Their experiences borne out from innovative approaches and strategies used in programmes and service for street children could contribute to efforts for developing National, State and City level programmes for street children.

Responses currently on

As mentioned early that NGO's have been the first ones to respond through various approaches. Unfortunately several NGO's who had started programmes and services for street children some years back have tended to be guided by the old approach for care, treatment and rehabilitation of destitute children. Institutional approaches still seem attractive to them though "better" institutions seem to be their goals. Rehabilitation is understood and attempted through securing of employment preceded by some training and final "rehabilitation" is accomplished by manipulating and conditioning children to be "settled" in marriage quite often with a partner who is also from some institution.

However, some of the recent initiatives of NGO's who are involved with issues concerning street children are biased clearly towards non-institutional approaches, focussed on street based contacts, non-formal education, assessment of the needs and potentials of children and a broad based understanding

of rehabilitation either for returning to their homes or training in skills and access to self-employment or remunerative jobs.

Actions required

Micro level NGO projects do indeed present models for interventions and approaches that are effective for addressing the issues of Street Children. Nevertheless these are very modest and limited actions and hence there is a need for Central and State Govt. and Municipal Corporations to take up initiatives in the face of rapidly increasing number of street children especially in the metropolitan cities of India.

To begin with the public media has to play it's role in correcting the stereo types about Street Children, who are often seen by the public as delinquents, thieves and nuisance. Unfortunately even the commercial films tend to re-inforce this image. They are never projected as children with ingenuity, potentials and ambitions who are struggling to seek what their families, society and life have denied them.

National government and State government schemes, which are for the benefit of abandoned and destitute children need to be revised so as to make them accessible to Street Children. Above all Municipal Corporations who are face to face with these children, who in many ways contribute to city's economy and subsidise quality of life of city dwellers, must recognise these street children as such and just as the Corporations provide benefits to the urban poor in the slums through various slum development programmes they must formulate special and suitable programmes and services relevant to the needs of street children. This will ensure provision of at least basic services for them like education, health, recreation etc. The best approach, however, to reach out to street children is for the Corporations to provide facilities and modest funds to NGO's who have the necessary rapport with and commitment for street children. This approach is more preferred than the Corporations attempting to provide services directly to street children. The difference in these approaches is obvious.

Conclusions

To recapitulate, the phenomenon of street children is a global one and every developing country is faced with it.

We need to respond now so that the problem of street children does not rapidly grow in magnitude and becomes difficult to handle. The street children are children first, and hence need all our sympathy and support in their process of development and growth, and their struggle to be respectable and contributing citizens. The national government, the state government, the municipal corporations and NGO's have a very specific role to play and to contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of these children. Similarly every member of the public and the citizen of the country can contribute meaningfully to improve the lot of these children. All of us need to act now.

It is important to remember that the children on the street are there on the street not as a choice, but have been driven to seek a solution to shelter and a home, which has been deprived to them by poverty and family disintegration. They are engaged in a struggle for survival and a chance to grow from childhood to adulthood with the hope of becoming one day decent and acceptable citizens of the country. The challenge is to all of us by these street children to create an environment and conditions that will help them grow.

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Gerry J. Pinto

2. No Roof but the Stars

We had moved into the new housing colony at Bangalore, among the middle class employees from factories, banks and public sector, and soon we realized that in our locality there was a high incidence of petty thievery. In most of the houses in that area, the toilets were situated in the compound outside the main house. It is normal to place containers like plastic mugs, buckets, soap-trays in the toilets to facilitate morning chores. It was frustrating to find them missing periodically in almost every house. One can imagine the fury of the residents, but, apart from a few abusing words nothing significant happened for a couple of months.

One warm, humid night in August, I was awakened by a commotion outside, with many people shouting and yelling. I ventured out, and learnt that the thief who stole our containers had been caught. To my utter surprise, the *thief* was a little boy from the nearby slum, not more than ten years old. The venom and fury of the crowd was on him. The swollen-bruised features of the boy said it all !!!

It seemed there were two involved; one would go around picking up the utensils and the other with a gunny bag waited at the street corner. They had caught the one with the bag. I saw the boy tied to a map-post, bleeding profusely through the nose. Hectic preparation was on to hand him over to the police and also to catch the other one. Something at that moment prompted me to think of our own little ones in bed, safe and sound, protected and well cared for, secure within four walls... These slum children! It was obnoxious and disgusting to think how they are brought up! But then something broke inside me... the sight of this little child, tied up, broken, miserable. Why did he steal? That night the police were summoned and the boy was taken away. That night I was one of the decent folks, and we had all the evidence. We were the judges and upholders of the law.

But the reality of life, that the little child enacted before me, kept me awake many nights. I could see his face, the anguish, shame and fear. No child need experience life this way! It is not fair... Memories of Charles Dickens novels, *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, the children whose lives we read in stories, the unknown ones, who moved our hearts and brought tears to the eyes flashed through my mind. But this *one* was real, he was our own... sitting on the edge of society and going through the rough side of life. What can I do for him? Over the years providence drove me to find solutions!

Five years later, we saw him again... myself and my colleague on our rounds, on the street. It was his posture that caught the eye... A silhouette, in tattered clothes, hanging cross-like, one hand holding on to the railing and the other outstretched to nowhere, feet deftly balancing on the grill, we saw the boy between two worlds: facing him was the well planned, luxuriously spaced, Indiranagar housing colony, with delicious aroma of food prepared, in the nearby posh restaurant floating in the air... Behind him was the open gutter, flowing through and beyond the huts and mud-house, dirt and squalour. It looked as though the boy was trapped between two worlds. He could not escape from one or the other, he could not venture into any. It was symbolic, pathetic and inviting. As we approached him, he began to slide down, turn and run, and suddenly he stopped and broke into big smile. 'Brother' he called out. Yes, he knew us, his companions had told him of the Centre, the video films, sports, food, education, some one who cares and the brothers who visit the boys on the street. So far, he had seen us from a distance but today the brothers went to him. As he moved closer to us with a boyish grin on his face, we suddenly recognised him. That same anguished face. The boy who tore my heart many nights ago.

We sat together, on a stone bridge on top of the gutter, comfortable enough for the boy. A few remarks here and there, and a delicate touch and his story came out. At first in bits and pieces, mumbling, and then gaining momentum, almost in a torrent. The little boy testified on behalf of many others like him. He spoke of abuse, denial, hatred, deprivation, negligence..., of rejection, violence, scorn and loneliness. 'Manju'

narrated events, situations, thoughts and experiences, older and uglier than the fifteen year old frame of his body could endure. At that moment, unwittingly I reminded him of that particular night when I actually saw him. The boy shrank before us, painfully recollecting one of the many nights he had gone through. I had plunged the dagger. I had reminded him of the past which the street does not bother about. Abruptly he stood up, he wanted to go; he had other work. But I was not prepared to lose him a second time. He had suffered much. It was time somebody took him to heart. A gentle invitation for a cup of tea at the wayside tea stall. Little Manju's eyes shone. "Perhaps these people are a different sort." Our sensitivity at that time helped us to recognise and respond to his silent plea for something better. And over the cup of tea, a friendship was cemented.

Like little Manju, there are hundreds and thousands in the streets of Bangalore, fighting a silent battle for survival, writing unheralded epitaphs, seeking us to enlist you for their cause. These children whose faces are carved in our hearts, are always before us, in every plea we make, every message we share, reminding us of the task ahead... inviting *You* to join in their struggle for a new life.

Anselm Rosario

3. If You are there I can do It

We meet them everywhere in the streets of Bombay, in railway stations, in trains in 'Salaam Bombay', in the villages, in people's homes: children who make us pause, stop for a while in wonder, in hope, in dismay. Their stories are straight and simple; they are touching and powerful. They are an inspiration, a call, a driving force, a question mark. (Some of the names given below are fictitious, others are real.)

1. Selvi

The Pandyan express stopped at Dindigal station. The usual pushing and pulling to get in with luggage and find the correct reserved seat started. I realized that I was pushing along with a lean girl of about 11 pulling along a suitcase twice her size. In the ladies' bay the family was already installed: a woman with her husband, her father-in-law, and Raju their little son about three years old. The girl pulled in their heavy suitcase. The three grown-ups there knew where the suitcase had to be, but not how to help her. I learned that the girl's name was Selvi. Her clothes were worn out and torn. A coolie worker's fourth child, she looked frightened. The lady ordered her to sit on the floor of the compartment among pieces of luggage. The girl was hesitant to accept my invitation to sit near me. "No need", intervened the lady, "she is only a servant." The lady then went on to explain how worried the family was about Raju who was suffering from an eye infection; they were accompanying him to a hospital in Madras. I should pray, requested the lady, for Raju's recovery.

When the berths were being made for the night's rest, Selvi was given a rag, and asked to go and sit outside, next to the toilets. She looked scared. I offered to share my berth with Selvi, upon which the whole family sought eagerly to convince me that the girl was very poor, that she should be happy to stay with them, and that they had to keep her 'in place'. I inquired discreetly about her pay and her schooling,

and was told, "we treat her as our own child". Meanwhile Selvi had gone off to sleep in a corner of my berth. Closing the conversation I expressed my wish that all the prayers and good wishes and care would help Raju, and that Selvi too could enjoy similar care.

They continued to discuss why I bothered at all. I thought of the many Selvi's, the numerous girl-children working in houses with no one to care for them, with no pay, and no future.

When the family was getting off the train at Mambalam, I noticed the husband and the father-in-law taking care of the big suit-case. The lady turned to me with the query, will Raju surely and really recover if I cared also for Selvi?" Selvi heard it and smiled.

2. Parvathy

On the 31st of December, 1988 a police constable brought a seven year old girl, visibly marked by pain and fright, to Nazareth Illam, the Madras Centre for domestic workers. St. Marietta welcomed the child as a new year's gift.

Within a few days Parvathy narrated her own story. When a child she lost her parents. Her maternal aunt brought the five-year old Parvathy home to do domestic work. The child did all the odd jobs in her aunt's house. Her aunt gave her food and shelter, but also beat her up severely, grossly insulted her, and shouted at her incessantly. On the 30th of December the child was thrown out of the house and left on the streets.

Parvathy was scared, not knowing where to go. Where her aunt to give her a second chance, involving even severer beatings, she would have accepted it: so unbearable and terrifying for the child was the utter loneliness in the great city. She wandered about the Mylapore area, looking for a place to sit, a corner to stay in. A policeman seeing her over and over again as she went up and down the street, took her to the Nazareth Illam.

Now Parvathy calls herself Sangeetha. She has started going to school.

3. Three Brothers

Dominic is 12 years old and Denzil is 10. They have a younger brother Darryl who is a severe case of the mentally handicapped. The way Matilda, the mother of the three boys, cares for her children would strike you as exceptionally sensible and beautiful. You would wonder what sustains her. Most people are ambitious for their children. But here you meet a woman and John, her man, full of love and care. Pain and suffering and caring have made them completely open to children and children's feelings, thoughts and concerns. Equally amazing is the love and care Dominic and Denzil have for their brother.

Dominic shared: "...Mummy, and Daddy too when he is home, have time for us. Mummy understands Darryl. Sometimes Darryl shakes his hand and Mummy runs to carry him. At other times Mummy says, Darryl has pain. She knows how to talk to Darryl. I cannot play football with Darryl. But I know what games he likes. He likes being hugged, and being pushed around in his wheel-chair. Sometimes I ask, "Why should Darryl be like that?" Mummy answers: "The Doctors do not know. No one does. It is like that".

"Often I wish Darryl were like the rest of us boys. But then we would fight. Now I do not fight with Darryl. We are happy in our family. I take Darryl along to my friends', and all my friends like Darryl too. They play with him, and carry him. If they do not they cannot be my friends because Darryl is my brother. I want to grow big and strong, so that I can carry Darryl when Mummy cannot.

"Some people and boys do not know what to say to Darryl... What can I do? They do not teach such things in school. But Mummy knows. I get angry when they say something wrong of Darryl. When Mummy said one day that we might have to put Darryl in an institute, I could not sleep... and I discovered in the night that Darryl too was not sleeping.

We want Darryl at home. When people keep staring at Darryl I am lost. Then I stop and stare back at them, scanning them from head to foot. Maybe, then they feel how we feel. Many people say they admire Mummy and Daddy. Also

to me they say, 'It is fine, Dominic; what a good brother you are'. But all my friends are for Darryl too.

"I would like to know what Darryl thinks, how he feels. If only Darryl could tell us -- what I see in his eyes. Someone said, Darryl lives like a plant. But that is not true. When we are with him I know that he feels and thinks more than what he can express. His whole being says something. He lives in another world, in something different...."

And Dominic carries him again, proud and determined, and says, He is not heavy, he is my brther.

4. Aradhana

Aradhana, deaf from her birth (and dumb), is an incorruptible witness. She is six years old. For some six months she lived with her uncle and aunt in one of the Bombay slums.

Her uncle Sanjee drinks and batters his wife regularly. On March 23rd the aunt was 90 percent burnt; she leaped into the gutter, and was taken to the hospital where she died.

Aradhana was the only eye-witness of what really happened that night. Her witness has to be interpreted, but it cannot be tampered with. Twisted or corrupted, because for a deaf girl facts are facts. This morning two police officers came with Sanjee and Aradhana, with the request that the girl's "language" be translated into words. However much the uncle, the police or anyone else wanted her to say other things, Aradhana's signs were the clearest I ever read. With unmistakable gestures she made it clear beyond any shadow of a doubt that her uncle was always, always drinking, and that he used to beat her aunt ruthlessly. That particular night he poured something over her, and she looked wet. He then took a match box, lit a match and... The face and body of the little child shrank in horror as she gestured the flames and the cry of her aunty.

When to be sure we made gestures suggesting that her aunty might have been cooking and might have caught fire from the fireplace or the stove. Aradhana's *no* was emphatic and precise... It left no room for doubt. The child gestured the whole scene again. Her *no* is *no* and her *yes* is *yes*.

5. Rani

Rani is a Tamil girl from Mysore, lively and keen of mind, the eldest of a family of six. Her father works hard, but does not earn enough for so large a family. Her mother is sickly, but works in a house where she gets lunch and Rs. 15 a month for six hours of work daily. Rani's family ran into debts. With the help of a priest they borrowed a sum of money from a "well-to-do family" in Bombay. In repayment of the debt, Rani has to work in this Bombay household for three years. There is no work contract, no conditions of work have been laid down.

Rani who loves her brothers and sisters and who has been doing well in school, was brought to Bombay. Work starts for her early in the morning: filling pots with water, fetching milk, sweeping, cleaning. . . The work kept growing steadily. Now Rani is on her feet and on duty the entire day, from early dawn till evening. The family speaks English, Rani speaks only Tamil. There is a school nearby where Rani could follow evening classes, but the lady of the house would not let her. Rani studies English on her own. The two children in the house never invite her for games, never talk to her, but spy on her when she goes for Mass so that she will not speak to anyone. The lady punishes her by denying food and threatening to put her out on the steps to sleep.

Rani has found her own way to get in contact with persons who stand by her, who encourage her, and correct the language work she does. With these she shares her dreams, of returning to Mysore, of going to school, of working for Daddy, Mummy and her little brothers and sisters, of playing with them. And she says: "when you are here. . . I can do it".

Jeanne de Vos

4. Rag-pickers' Pedagogy

Street children – a closer look

A casual walk in the back streets of Bangalore, in the thick of market places, commercial areas, in alleys where clusters of shops which manufacture assorted goods are situated; a walk around the city's main bus stops, railway station, in and around hotels and places of amusements; a concerned person cannot miss the sight of children engaged in various trades and activities making a living for themselves and their families. Their occupation ranges from collecting garbage to guarding parked cycles and motorised two wheelers. They are engaged in selling newspapers and magazines. They work as petty hawkers, pedlars and messenger boys, as vendors and shoe-shiners, waiters, cleaners, helpers in shops and establishments, wage earners in construction sites; they work at automobile shops, in gas stations and in myriads of small factories and industries.

Street children, child labourers, child prostitutes, abandoned children, abused children, neglected children and exploited children are some of the terms used to identify children in disadvantaged situations. Rapid urbanisation, pressures of rural poverty, natural and man-made disasters and many other factors contribute to increasing tide of migration from rural areas to the cities. The phenomenon sends millions of families to the metropolis in search of hope and a share in the city's prosperity. These migrants add on to the population of the urban poor who are assigned to the ever growing numbers of slum dwellers. In such circumstances the children of the urban poor too often find themselves active participants in the whole family's struggle for survival. If the family cannot hold together, they seek survival by themselves — in the street.

Lives and situations of these children defy traditional responses to destitute and abandoned children. There is a need for developing innovative approaches suitable and relevant to their

needs. These children must be sought out in their places of work or on the streets. Such programmes should be community based, and operated by people whom the children readily accept. There is need to create preventive strategies to increase the capacity of families and communities to protect their children. This calls for a grand alliance between governmental and non-governmental entities to devise programmes and implement them effectively. Understanding of root causes, strategies to alleviate poverty, more educational opportunities, satisfaction of basic human needs, are some concrete measures the Government can undertake to prevent the growth of the problem.

Project implementation – some milestones

During 1979, the concern for the rag-pickers found expression in the form of discussions and meetings among the interreligious dialogue group at Ashirwad, Bangalore.

Phase 1 (1981-84): The result was the gaining of an entry point into the world of the poor through a small retail waste paper purchasing shop. Ragpickers were contacted at the street level and were encouraged to come and sell the paper at the shop. Facilities like bathing and toilet were provided. Intensive work in the form of identifying agents and wholesalers was undertaken. A study on the market and its operation, starting from the level of the ragpickers to the finished product in the form of recycled paper was conducted. An empirical study on the socio-economic situation of the ragpickers and their places of stay was recorded. Purchasing and selling sorted-out materials to the agents, recreational activities, periodical meetings and discussion among the ragpickers were the features of these days.

Phase 2 (1985): Construction of a shelter began in early 1985 and was completed by August 1985. A group of 15 boys were present during the official opening day for paper purchasing (10th August 1985) and the centre was inaugurated by the youngest of the boys in keeping with the philosophy of the centre to keep everything in low key. The activities of the centre began in the form of large-scale paper purchasing from the boys. The aim of the centre at that time was to reduce exploitation by giving right amount of money as ragpickers' share. Soon the word passed around that a new paper godown was

buying waste paper. The reputation of the centre began to grow. A large number of ragpickers, especially women, began to visit the centre. On an average the centre was purchasing from 65 ragpickers per day. Simultaneously the homeless ragpickers began to utilise the centre as shelter. Many experiments were conducted to enable the boys to use the centre as co-operative purchasing unit. The experiments failed due to lack of future orientation and extreme individualism inherent in the boys. Then an idea of starting a small scale waste paper recycling factory was explored. A study on the market, and economic and technical feasibility was initiated. The idea was finally dropped, because a factory would always be dependent on the ragpickers. The project would be forced to perpetuate ragpicking in the present form. The running of the centre with the boys and purchasing of garbage had become a tedious affair. On an average, the centre was purchasing anywhere between two-thirds to one ton of waste paper per day. Sorting and selling the baled paper occupied the whole day. Little time was given to the ragpickers in terms of their development. Constant reflection among the staff and the people concerned with the project, resulted in a move to abandon wastepaper purchasing and to concentrate on education and development of the boys. By this time many boys knew about the centre and had experimented staying at the centre for a couple of days or weeks. The boys themselves expressed the need for studies and some learning, so that they could integrate themselves in the society.

Phase 3 (1987): The transition from paper purchasing to education was a slow process. The boys were prepared for regular schedule of study, work and play. Advocacy in the form of Audio Visual slide programme was utilised in schools, colleges and with service agencies like Rotary and Lion's clubs and Governmental agencies. The activities of the centre got the attention of the people and the Government personnel.

Phase 4 (1988): A break-through in the whole approach of the centre was effected during this year. Two well equipped skill-training units were started on the premises. A six-month course comprising learning of the local language, Mathematics and English along with acquiring of skills either in motorised two wheeler machanism or tailoring was introduced. Street base among the rag-picking boys was greatly strengthened through

many activities. Work to prevent children leaving slum homes for the street began to take shape. Focus on women and girl ragpickers, inter-agency collaboration, Government and community intervention were the features of this phase.

The project and its philosophy

"Given understanding, security, warmth, love and a healthy environment, any one can develop, even youngsters with the grimmest histories can show astonishing power of recuperation and become indistinguishable from more fortunate contemporaries." The children who seek survival on the street are the most abused and exploited ones in society. They are the segment most marginalised and pushed to the "edge". They are a constant reminder of the injustice and callousness of society.

Since they are "nobody" in society, our philosophy aims at becoming "some one" to them. The highly personalised approach of Ragpicker Education and Development (REDS) personnel establishes a vital contact and rapport with the street children. This contact enables a process of becoming some one to them which in turn facilitates their becoming "some body" in life. REDS' approach at this stage is to provide the climate and the environment necessary to enable the children to reflect and compare the unorganised life on the street with programmes and facilities available at the centre. Since street children especially ragpickers are denied human dignity the REDS' animation programme aims at self-confidence, self-image, organisation, co-responsibility, participation and co-operation. Time, flexibility, option and conscious decision are the key words in its approach. With profound respect for the child and faith in his/her potential, decisions are made. Ragpickers are the REDS' partners, giving purpose, direction, motivation and commitment to create a just and equitable society.

A reflection

This is a highly specialised work, the street animator is guided into the art of befriending the ragpickers and extending services on the street. To make street contact-work effective a pedagogy has been devised over the years through reflec-

tion and direct experience. The potential animator is first exposed to the children staying at the centre. There, he/she gains familiarity with the boys, learns about their life style, behavioural patterns, languages and the styles of functioning. Then a team of two members is trained to develop the knack of making street contacts. They are given a number of statements on which to make conversation with the child/youth on the street. They are also helped not to ask certain types of questions which may turn off the boys. Usually the contact is made at the dustbin where the boys collect the waste paper or at the retail shop where waste paper and plastics are sold. In the former case the contact is made with a single boy and in the latter with the retail merchants, where groups of boys normally stay.

In the case of individual contact, it may succeed at the beginning itself, or it may take some time. As the relationship gets built in, the children and youth feel at ease and reassured in the presence of the animator. They accept the fact that there is 'some one' to rely on. Care is taken not to invite, force or coerce them to come to the centre. Usually contacts are made to befriend the boys, to gain knowledge about their area and also about others, who are involved in ragpicking.

Intervention at the retail shop is not an easy affair. Often boys stay at the shop because there is no alternative. They are tied down by the money they borrow from the retail merchant. In most cases the merchants themselves would like the boys to stay because they are assured of regular supply of waste materials. Again one cannot generalise and count all retailers as exploiters because a few of them express genuine concern for the boys and would be willing to do something for their development. The approach at the retail shops is always linked with group activity, like common play, a walk to a picnic spot, group cinema etc. Visit to the centre is encouraged at this point. Most retailers in Bangalore are familiar with us and therefore there is no point in hiding our identity or concern for the rag-pickers.

Integrating the youth through regular programmes

As the relationship gets built, the idea of the existence of the centre is conveyed to them. The ones who are in contact with the animator are encouraged to participate in various

programmes of the centre and to avail themselves of the opportunities. The strategy we use in this case would be to organise a week-end programme at the centre. These programmes are conducted twice a month and normally 80 to 100 boys come over to the centre on Friday afternoons. The programmes are so structured that the boys stay over-night. The boys have a good time of sports, music, games, songs, dramas and movies. It is a day of fun and freedom along with a process of dialogue of life, group-living and socialisation. Older and ex-ragpickers are invited to talk to the boys. The boys are encouraged and given directions in life. They are enabled to make some options and decisions. Most of them drift back to the street on Saturday afternoon but some do stay 3 or 4 days to experiment with the centre. Some again would like to stay but they have borrowed much from the retailers and are not in a position to leave their shops. One cannot really predict the option a boy would take at this juncture. For those who like to stay at the centre opportunities for growth are provided. They can continue with their paper picking and participate in evening classes and recreation or go through a systematic programme of education and training for six months. The schedule for the six month programme is rigorous but not rigid. It is flexible, fashioned according to their needs. There is no priority with regard to admission. However the boys are not encouraged to join in the middle of the course. It is hard for many boys; used to unstructured existence on the street, to go through some sort of discipline and sharing of responsibilities. Often the protection and care offered at the centre enables the boys to make comparison of his life on the street and the possibilities provided at the centre. Working and living together in groups, enables them to develop a less selfish attitude, and to deepen their spirit of cooperation.

Building up ties with their families

Here the animators try to trace the homes of the boys and establish contact with the family. Often it happens that some boys go back to their homes. Some others start visiting their parents regularly and share with them their income. All this is done through regular visits and counselling. Efforts are made in every case to reunite them with their families.

Anselm Rosario

The Child Krishna

One of the most popular images of Kṛṣṇa is that of the chubby child with a hand in a pot of churned butter and his face all smeared with it. In literature, in the various arts, and in religion it is the child and youthful Krishna — not the adult, princely Krishna — who holds sway. Throughout the length and breadth of India, the child Krishna has inspired countless works in Sanskrit, Prākṛt, Apabhraṁśa, and the numerous regional languages. Not only Hindu texts, but also Jain and Buddhist works narrate different stories of this famous child.

While the earlier Hindu stories depict Krishna more in heroic hues, the later texts paint a progressively more divine portrait of him¹. For our purpose we will consider the stories according to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*² since it is the most important scriptural text for the followers of Krishna. We shall treat the episodes which deal with the infancy and early childhood of Krishna up to the age of five, called *kaumāra*³. These are covered in Chs. 1-14 of the 10th Skandha of the *Bhāgavata*.

Myths are polysemous and can never be unravelled completely. Viewed with various lenses, they yield different meanings. A variety of approaches have been used to interpret them: historical, comparative, folkloristic, structural, symbolic, sociological, psychological, theological and so forth. In this article, a brief outline of each episode will be followed by some comments including a sampling of different interpretations⁴. We shall pay special attention to the incidents portraying Krishna as a playful, mischievous child. And we shall conclude with some reflections on the significance of these stories for the children of India today.

1. The conception and birth of Krishna (1. 17-5. 18)

In answer to Earth's prayer to be freed from the oppressing weight of millions of demons (*asuras*), Viṣṇu promises her

intercessor Brahma to come to her rescue by taking birth in the family of Vasudeva. The gods will be born as members of the Yadava clan and the celestial women will become herds-women.

Meanwhile, in Mathurā, Vasudeva marries Kamsa's sister Devaki. While driving their bridal chariot, Kamsa hears a voice from the sky foretelling that Devaki's eighth son would slay him. Enraged, Kamsa wants to kill his sister on the spot. But Vasudeva pleads for her life and promises to deliver the eight children born of her to Kamsa. At first, Kamsa spares their first-born son, but later imprisons Vasudeva and Devaki and proceeds to kill their children as soon as they are born. The goddess Yoganidrā, however, secretly transfers the seventh embryo of Devaki into the womb of Vasudeva's other wife Rohiṇi, who is living in a cowherd settlement (*vraja*), under the care of the cowherd Nanda. This child will be called Balarama, the elder brother of Krishna.

Then, in the fullness of time, Viṣṇu enters into the mind of Vasudeva, and Devaki conceives mentally. As soon as she is with child, her radiance lights up the whole prison. Brahmā, Śiva and others glorify Krishna who has taken on a human form solely out of sport, i.e., without any benefit for himself. As the moment of Krishna's birth approaches, the heavenly bodies assume peaceful aspects and the whole of nature blooms and flourishes. Celestial kettle-drums sound and various heavenly beings dance with joy and shower praises and flowers. At midnight, when the darkness is thickest, Krishna manifests himself like the full moon rising in the East. His parents are blessed with a vision of him in all his divine splendour and glory, but finally he assumes the form of a human baby. At the same time, in the cowherd settlement, Yoganidra is born as a girl to Yaśodā, the wife of Nanda.

Instructed by the Lord, Vasudeva carries the baby Krishna to Nanda's house. The guards fall asleep; the prison gates open of their own accord; Śeṣa, the lord of serpents, protects Krishna from the torrential rains with his several hoods; and the river Yamuna, even though in spate, yields an easy passage to Vasudeva. At Nanda's settlement, finding that all are asleep, Vasudeva exchanges Krishna for Yoganidra and returns to the prison with her.

When Kamsa tries to dash this girl to death, she slips from his hand and, rising up in the sky in her divine form, warns him that his destroyer is already born elsewhere. Kamsa sets Vasudeva and Devaki free but, advised by his ministers, he decides to massacre all infants of ten days or less⁵, and to kill Brahmins, ascetics, seers and cows.

Amidst great rejoicing and merry-making, Krishna's birth ceremony (*jatakarma*) is performed at the cowherd station. Later, the sage Garga performs the naming ceremony for Krishna and Balarama, and compares Krishna to Narayana (8.1-20).

Comments

Although the *Bhagavata* emphasizes the religious dimension, heroic motifs are not absent in its narration. Like a hero, Vishnu responds to a call to embark on an adventure on earth. Immediately after being born, he is exiled to live as a humble cowherd; but later he will return to Mathura to be recognized. Both his conception and his birth are extraordinary. Yet, in contrast to earlier texts, the *Bhāgavata* stresses the divine elements. It declares that Krishna is conceived virginally, for Devaki conceives mentally. The commentator Sridhara, as further elucidated by the notes (*ṭippana*), explains that Vasudeva transfers the manifestation of Vishnu from his mind to that of Devaki by looking at her eyes (on 2. 16 and 18). Unlike creatures, Krishna has no extrinsic purpose: he takes on a human form freely and merely as a sport⁶. At the time of his birth, nature itself is transformed to welcome him and the heavenly hosts rejoice. The contrast between light and darkness is brought into relief when Krishna is compared to the full moon rising in pitch darkness. He manifests himself to his parents in all his divine glory and he is praised as the Supreme Visnu⁷. An extraordinary conception, birth and epiphany are some of the features of a saviour myth⁸. The fact that Krishna is the eighth child has cosmological significance⁹. Even when Vasudeva, like Christopher, carries him across to Nanda's house, there is a series of miraculous incidents which serve to highlight Krishna's divinity.

Jean Herbert interprets the myth of Krishna as a *yoga*

or *sadhana* (spiritual discipline) culminating in a joyous union with the divine. At times his interpretations may appear far-fetched and unconvincing, but he also has some interesting insights. We shall briefly present his interpretations for what they are worth. The earth represents the level of consciousness which corresponds to the world of multiplicity. On this level of consciousness, human beings are weighed down by innumerable chains from which they long to be liberated¹⁰. In response to this yearning, the divine descends and manifests itself in a dazzling vision. But this is only a beginning: the *sadhaka* (practitioner of spiritual discipline) has a long and arduous path to tread before reaching permanent union with the divine¹¹. After his insulation in the womb of the divine Devaki (for 'Devaki' is derived from *deva*, i.e., god), the *sadhaka* travels to the terrestrial world of Yosoda (for she is the re-incarnation of Dhara or earth [see 8.48-50]) by crossing the river Yamuna, which at one and the same time both joins and separates the two worlds. He leaves the world of unity for the world of multiplicity and it is here that he will struggle against the demonic forces¹². After Kamsa's plans are foiled by Yoganidra, he wages war on three fronts: he (i) tries to suppress the exterior elements which could aid spiritual progress (i.e., the gods and sages who have descended at the same time as Krishna) by killing the infants, (ii) attacks moral virtues and ritual acts by persecuting brahmins, ascetics and so forth, and (iii) tries to hinder the direct vision of the truth by getting rid of the seers¹³.

From the psychoanalytic point of view, we may apply some of the comments of Jung in his discussion of the "child archetype". The psychic genesis from "ego" to "self" is represented by the miraculous conception and birth of the divine child Krishna. His imprisonment, exile in the cowherd settlement, and the other dangers in the form of demons, etc., that he will have to face, all underline the great difficulties one has to overcome in achieving wholeness or a synthesis of the conscious and the unconscious. The "child" must advance towards individuation and independence, and thus has necessarily to detach itself, from its origins; exile or abandonment, therefore, is a *sine qua non*, a necessary condition. It expresses a psychic experience which has for its object a new and as yet unknown

content. This unknown content fascinates the conscious mind and thus makes it go beyond itself towards wholeness. The "child" is thus a uniting symbol, i. e., one that makes whole, and hence has redemptive value. Therefore Krishna, like so many saviours, is a divine child. Further, his appearing as light in the dark night symbolizes the victory of the conscious over the unconscious¹⁴.

In the past there was a strong tendency among scholars to identify gods as personifications of different natural phenomena. In our context, it has been suggested, for instance, that the first six children of Devaki who were killed by Kāṁsa symbolize winter, while Krishna and Balarama represent the first months of spring¹⁵. Some consider Krishna as a solar hero or deity: in the case, Krishna's miraculous birth refers to the sun's sudden and mysterious rising out of the dark night¹⁶. Not only in the case of Krishna, but also in general, solarism as a theory has set long ago, and lies far below the horizon of contemporary scholarly interest¹⁷.

2. Putana is saved (6. 2-44)

Pūtana is a bird demoness who kills infants. Deputed by Kāṁsa, she goes about murdering babies. One day, taking the form of a beautiful woman, she enters the house of Nanda and begins to suckle Krishna with her breasts, which are smeared with an indigestible, dreadful paste. Aware of her identity, Krishna not only drinks her milk but, squeezing her breasts, also sucks out her very life. Shrieking in pain, she assumes her hideous form. As she collapses, her gigantic carcass crushes all the trees within a radius of twelve miles. Concerned about his safety, the cowherds perform rites of protection for Krishna, and Yasoda breastfeeds him and puts him to bed. When the herdsmen burn the body of Putana, a fragrant smoke rises up from it, a sign that all her sins are consumed. And if this happens to a demoness like Putana, how much more will Krishna's devotees and the cows and herdswomen who suckle him with maternal affection not be subject to transmigration!

Comments

Here too we can find traces of heroic motifs such as the attempt to kill the infant hero, suckling an enemy, and the hero undergoing a near-death experience. But these are

completely overshadowed by the religious elements. Krishna recognizes Putana for what she is. Although he is the Supreme Lord, he acts like a child, keeping his immense glory hidden. Krishna also bestows salvation on her by killing her: from the corpse of Putana, whose name means 'stinking', there arises a fragrant smoke!

It is remarkable that Putana attains salvation even though she tries to kill Krishna. This is an example of what we may call salvation through hatred. The *Bhagavata* calls it the path of hatred (*saṁrambhamarga*) (3. 2. 24). What matters is not the motivation, but the intensity of the emotion. A person hates Krishna so much that all the time he is thinking of him, concentrating on him. Since Krishna is the omnipotent Lord, he can grant salvation to one who concentrates on him so intensely. This type of salvation is attained only during the life of Krishna on earth: the later literature does not mention anyone attaining salvation by hating Krishna after the latter has returned to his heavenly abode¹⁸.

In this episode the *Bhagavata* contrasts the hatred of Putana with the devotion of Krishna's followers, who stand to gain much more than she. Putana's suckling Krishna reminds the *Bhagavata* of the special form of devotion called parental love (*valsalya-bhakti*), for it makes a reference to the cows and herdswomen who regard Krishna as their son. We shall discuss this form of devotion later.

Let us now look at this event from the point of view of *sudhana*. The first obstacle the *sudhaka* has to overcome is possessive maternal love represented by Putana. That such maternal love can obliterate spiritual aspirations in the infant is shown by the fact that Putana's cadaver crushes the trees—which represent the desire to grow spiritually. Krishna profits from all that is constructive in the maternal love of Putana by drinking her milk, but he eliminates all that is injurious, paralysing and destructive. And that which is capable of being sublimated is purified by fire, so that the fumes emit a delicate fragrance. At the end Krishna sucks the milk of Yasoda, whose love for him is not possessive¹⁹.

We turn now to a psychoanalytic interpretation. As the child grows older and is about to be weaned, its alienation

from its mother is fantasized as poisoned milk. In the process of becoming individuated and acquiring his own separate identity, he is thrown into a quandary: how to receive the nurturing love of his mother without being bound by her possessive love. There are also undertones of the child dealing with the sexually demanding "bad mother". Krishna's squeezing Putana's breast with his mouth and not letting go till she falls dead is an act of oral sexual violence that caters to the bad mother's sexual needs and at the same time takes revenge on her for making such demands. By killing his "bad mother" in fantasy, the son gets rid of the excessively possessive and sexually demanding maternal images of his psyche, but preserves the protective, favourable image of his mother: the stimulating smells of her milk and sweat are transformed and rendered benign, for a fragrant smoke arises from her dead body²⁰.

In the solar interpretation, Putana, whose name signifies putrid, decomposed material, is destroyed by the Sun²¹. Or Putana is said to be one of the Kṛttika stars called Śītā Putana the goddess of small-pox; she is killed by the Sun Krishna²².

3. Krishna overturns the cart (7.4-17)

On one occasion Yasoda puts Krishna to bed under a cart, and attends to the guests who have arrived for the celebration of Krishna's turning in bed. Hungry for milk, Krishna kicks up his feet, thus causing the cart to overturn. Its yoke breaks and the pots containing various liquid delicacies are smashed. Suspecting evil spirits, Yasoda asks Brahmins to perform rites of blessing on her child. The cowherds reassemble the cart and worship it with curds, etc.

Comments

In this incident Krishna is more like a hero manifesting his super-human strength. In the *Brāhmaṇḍa Purāṇa*²³ Krishna is called, "the destroyer of the demon (*asura*) in the form of a cart". By introducing an evil spirit, Krishna's feat is given a religious colouring, or at least made to appear more marvellous.

At this stage, the *sadhaka* overcomes dangers which result from the infant's becoming aware of his body and its relation to the external world through the senses because, in Hinduism, the cart (chariot) symbolizes the body. Krishna destroys the yoke, which symbolizes duality, and also break^s

the axle-tree (not mentioned in the *Bhagavata* version) which steers the cart, viz., the body, by means of the two wheels of past and present *karma*, which are now overturned. Once the yoke and the axle-tree are smashed, the demon, which symbolizes the threat of the dangers resulting from awareness of the body, disappears. The pots, whose contents represent the objects of the five senses, are broken; and their contents spill over, i.e., the *sadhaka* gets rid of his attachment to the sense-objects²⁴.

4. Trinavarta is killed (7. 18-32)

One day, suddenly finding the child Krishna too heavy for her, Yasoda places him on the ground and goes about her chores. Trīṇāvarta, another demon sent by Kamsa, arrives in the form of a whirlwind, and whisks the child off into the sky in a cloud of dust and darkness. But Krishna becomes too heavy for the demon and strangles him by the throat, so that he falls dead to the ground. Krishna of course remains unscathed.

Comments

Trnavarta's role is to veil (*avarta*) the *sadhaka's* vision of unity by infinite multiplicity represented by the blades of grass (*tṛṇa*). When the mother's love alone is insufficient to carry the child, the educators (Trnavarta), i.e., teachers, relatives, other adults, companions, etc., take over and introduce the child to multiplicity. This multiplicity, however, is not entirely to be avoided: it leads the *sadhaka* to a certain intellectual level (the sky). But like Trnavarta, it cannot make the *sadhaka* soar higher to the spiritual plane of unity. He must therefore take care not to allow himself to be blinded by these educators and the disorienting form of the whirlwind which Trnavarta assumes²⁵.

5. Krishna's play and mischief (8.21-8.45; 9.1-21)

A little older now, Krishna and his brother Balarama begin to move about on all fours. Crawling about in the mud, they follow passers-by, but immediately return to their mothers in fear. Watching them play, their mothers are ecstatic with joy. Soon the children grow bold, and their mothers are unable to restrain them from playing with animals and birds, fire and water, thorns and weapons.

Once he is able to walk, Krishna is upto more mischief. He untethers the calves before the milking time. If scolded, he laughs. He steals milk and curds from people's houses. Sometimes he feeds monkeys with curds; if they do not eat the curds, he smashes the pot. When he finds nothing to eat in people's houses, he gets angry and makes their infants cry. He urinates and defecates in their houses after they are swept clean. In spite of being so naughty, he pretends to be an innocent child! The herdswomen come in a body to complain to his mother of his boisterous yet charming pranks, but she breaks into laughter and does not chide him.

On another occasion, his companions complain to Yasoda that he has eaten mud. When asked by her, he denies having done so. But when she opens his mouth to check, she is surprised to see the entire universe in it. Realizing that it is not a dream or an illusion, she bows to him in adoration. Immediately, however, he uses his maya (power) to make her forget his true nature, so that she may continue to treat him as her son and shower her maternal love on him. (Yasoda had a similar vision on a previous occasion when Krishna yawned while sucking at her breast (7.34-37).

One day Yasoda has to interrupt her breastfeeding of Krishna in order to attend to the milk boiling over on the oven. Angered, the unsatisfied Krishna smashes the pot in which his mother was churning milk and enters the house in search of butter. When Yasoda returns, she sees the broken pot and espies him standing on an overturned mortar, furtively stealing butter and sharing it with a monkey. Catching sight of his mother with a cane in her hand, he quickly runs away, as if in fear. She pursues him, gets hold of him and threatens to beat him but, seeing him in tears, spares the rod. However, to keep him from mischief, she decides to tie him with a rope to a mortar. The rope however, falls short. She keeps adding more and more rope, but still the rope is not enough! Ultimately, Krishna allows himself to be bound.

In some other passages too the *Bhagavata* mentions Krishna's antics and games. Just as he submits himself to his mother, he also subordinates himself to the herdswomen. At their bidding, he brings a pair of sandals, a stool, etc. Singing, dancing and swinging his arms, he brings great joy to one

and all (11.7-9). He goes on playing well beyond the time-limit. So Yaśoda has to call out to him to breastfeed him and give him his bath and meals before he goes off to play again (11.12-20). While out grazing the calves, he and his companions imitate the cattle bellowing and fighting, play on flutes and play with their slings (11.37-40). They pull the tails of the monkeys and make faces at them, they hop around like frogs through streams and waterfalls, and imitate other animals and birds. What a blessed joy for his companions to be able to touch him and play with him, whom even self-controlled *yogins* – cannot attain (12.3-12)!

Comments

These motifs are to be found in the tales of young heroes in different parts of the world. They are disobedient, rude, unruly, play practical jokes, disturb, beat up and even mutilate their playmates, etc. Krishna's love for curds is a mild form of the voracious appetite of hero-children²⁶. The *Bhagavata* however, invests these themes with a religious meaning. In fact, among all the deeds of the child Krishna, it is these games and pranks that have endeared him to his devotees.

The *Bhagavata* never ceases to remind us of Krishna's divinity, often suggesting that his "deeds were not just what they appeared, but rather were hints or symbols or epiphanies of some truth that lies beyond"²⁷. Through the two visions granted to Yaśoda, one is made to realize that Krishna is not an ordinary child but the Lord himself. When the rope falls short, the *Bhagavata* exclaims that Yasoda is trying to tie Krishna who is the universe itself! And yet this infinite Lord has become a little child and allows himself to be caught and bound! He is both transcendent and accessible.

We also notice a positive, rather than negative, use of Krishna's *maya* (power): in granting Yasoda a vision of the world in his mouth, he uses his *maya* in order to reveal himself to her²⁸.

Krishna's play and pranks symbolize the unconditioned, free nature of the divine. Play (*lila*) is a characteristically divine activity in Hinduism²⁹. In his pioneering and penetrating study of how the play-element characterizes culture, Huizinga points out that play is essentially indulged in for the fun of

it: it is satisfying in itself and has no ulterior motive. It brings joy and expresses freedom. It steps out of ordinary life. It is supra-logical and transcends wisdom and foolishness, truth and falsehood, good and evil³⁰. These characteristics apply very well to the Hindu understanding of play (*lila*) in the realm of the divine, and particularly to the case of the child Krishna, for it is the very nature of a child to play. Krishna's unstructured, unpredictable, spontaneous, unrestrainable and boisterous playful activities and pranks express the free, spontaneous, unconditioned nature of God who delights in himself.³¹ As a mischievous and playful child, Krishna is able to manifest the unfettered, free nature of God much better than through an adult personification. Further, the playful activities of Krishna mirror, on the microcosmic level, the truth of creation on the macrocosmic plane, for creation, in the Hindu understanding, is but the play (*lila*) of God.

It is this carefree, irrepressible, joyous child Krishna that the *Bhagavata* dotes upon in unhurried and affectionate contemplation. Far from being ashamed to relate the unrestricted, natural play of the child Krishna, the *Bhagavata* narrates it with relish, hardly making any apology for it. The later Sanskrit commentators, however, take great pains to exonerate Krishna and remove any blemish that they feel may tarnish his portrait. Some of their justifications are the following. Since Krishna is the Lord, he should not be judged by human standards. Besides, he is merely imitating the behaviour of a child: a child is expected to be mischievous. His pranks actually attract his mother and the herds women to him in devotional love (*bhakti*). The herds women's complaints are only a pretence: actually, they want him to do more mischief. He breaks the cart and the churning pot because they are possessed by demons. He releases the calves at the wrong time because they are hungry. He eats what he has stolen not to feed himself, but to assuage the hunger of the little boys he must have swallowed into himself when sucking out the poisonous milk from Putana's breasts. He makes the infants cry because it is not proper that these little boys within him go hungry while their servants remain satisfied. When he denies that he has eaten mud, he is not lying since everything is within him right from the beginning. He distributes the food to the

monkeys because they were previously Rama's devotees. He makes himself too heavy for his mother's lap because he wants her to leave him alone on the ground so that she may not be harmed by the demon Trnavarta, who is going to attack him. He runs away from his mother so that she may obtain the unique grace of being able to tie him up³².

By becoming a child, Krishna becomes very accessible to his devotees. The understanding of God as a *mysterium tremendum*, awesome mystery, generates in us a sense of awe and respect, of distance and formalism. But God as a child evokes a spontaneous intimacy in us. By making himself dependent on his devotees, by his games and impish mischief, Krishna invites his devotees to approach him with the attitude of parental love or *vatsalya*. Literally, *vatsalya* is the love of the cow for its calf (*vatsa*). Just as we can relate to God as our master, friend, etc., we can also consider him as our child: this is *vatsalya-bhakti*, the devotion of parental love. The *Bhagavata* declares that Nanda and Yasoda have the most intense devotion towards Krishna since he is their son (8.51). We have seen that Yasoda is beside herself with joy as she suckles Krishna and gazes at him in ecstasy. The herdsmen and women too dote upon him with parental love. So important is this form of devotion that even after Yasoda realizes his divinity, Krishna overshadows her with his power (*maya*) so that she forgets his nature and once again treats him with maternal affection. The *Bhagavata* even associates the evil Putana's action of suckling Krishna with this form of devotion.

The followers of Krishna consider themselves to be his parents, particularly when his childhood deeds are enacted in the *Kṛṣṇa-lilas*³³, at the celebration of his birthday (*Janmastami*) and, in general, whenever they meditate on his childhood sports (*lilas*). The school of Śāṅkara considers the *avatara* (descent of God) to be unreal, while the theistic Vaiṣṇavites believe that the *avatara* is real. But even in the latter case, the *avatara* is completely free from all imperfections: hunger, thirst, suffering etc. This is so because the *avatara* is not made up of the imperfect matter (*prakṛti*), but of "pure matter" (*śuddha-sattva*)³⁴. In Christianity, on the other hand, Christ is truly human and subject to suffering, etc. This being so, it is indeed a paradox

that Hindus take the child Krishna much more seriously than Christians in reference to the Christ child. There is hardly any parental love for Christ in Christianity. Even at Christmas time, the predominant attitude is expressed by the carol "O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord". What the Christians need to do is not just to put Christ back into Christmas, but to put the Christ child into Christmas.

Among the pranks of Krishna, it is his stealing of butter which has a special attraction to his devotees. Hawley tells us that the inhabitants of Braj interpret it as Krishna's stealing of their hearts. Krishna is attracted to butter especially because it symbolizes the essence of love that Yasoda and the herdswomen wish to offer him. Krishna, however, prefers to steal it because in this way they can experience him in his full naturalness: as a guest or obedient son he would have to conform to artificial conventions. These would make the butter, i.e., their love, lose its freshness and taste. Just as a love bite or scratch intensifies the love between partners, so also the stealing of butter (love) gives it a sweet taste. Love is not a commodity to be stored (in pots) and apportioned; it is not to be possessed, but is to be freely and copiously shared³⁵.

6. The ogre Baka is slain (11.46-57)

Baka, in the form of a giant crane, swallows up Krishna only to be forced to spit him out as the latter burns his palate. Baka again attacks him with his beak, but Krishna slays him by ripping his bill in two, as easily as one splits a blade of grass.

Comments

The ease with which Krishna dispatches the demon is noteworthy. In fact, in the *Bhagavata*, Krishna's fights with all fiends are depicted more as playful activities (*lila*) than the Herculean efforts of a hero. Krishna takes it all in his stride; it is just another game for him³⁶.

The role of the crane is to hinder the *sadhaka* in his spiritual progress by making him take delight in intellectual thoughts, which cause doubts and hesitations. The intense ardour of Krishna, the great master of devotion, "burns" the ogre's entrails and thus rescues the devotee from its para-

lysing intellectualism. By separating the two parts of Baka's beak, Krishna destroys the duality which is responsible for the demon's power of aggression and absorption in intellectual thought³⁷.

7. The slaying of Agha (12.13-39)

Unable to bear the sight of Krishna's happy games and wanting to avenge the deaths of his elder sister Putana and his elder brother Baka, the demon Agha assumes the form of a gigantic serpent and lies motionless with his cavern-like mouth wide open. Krishna's companions walk into the trap and go right into his stomach. Krishna steps into his mouth but, stopping in his throat, expands himself. As a result, the ogre is choked to death, with his vital breath escaping through the *Brahma-randhra*, the aperture in the crown of the head. From his corpse a wonderful light flashes forth and enters into Krishna. The heavenly hosts rejoice at this feat of Krishna. That Krishna's touch removes the sins of even an evil spirit like Agha is not to be wondered at. For, if meditating on a mere mental image of Krishna leads one to a divine state, what will he not bestow on Agha whom he enters in person!

Comments

In this event, the heroic motifs, such as the swallowing of the hero and rescuing the boys from the jaws of death, are overshadowed by the religious elements. Agha (whose name means 'sin') attains salvation through hate. The sanctifying touch of Krishna is mentioned. In devotion (*bhakti*) a lot of importance is given to emotions and the senses. The sight and touch of Krishna are thus very significant to his devotees³⁸. The *Bhagavata* also refers to meditation and to the salvific presence of Krishna within Agha.

It should be remarked that, inspite of Krishna's deciding to prevent the boys from entering the orge's mouth, they do enter so that he is surprised at the working of fate (12.25-27). Although the *Bhagavata* elsewhere maintains that Krishna has control over destiny, here he is not shown to have full power over it³⁹.

Let us now turn to the progress of *sadhana*.

In general, it may be said that the myths portraying the victory of the "child" over various monsters represent the invincible power of the unconscious⁴⁰. From another point of view, the demons are projections of that part of ourselves we most fear or dislike. Many of these projections of fear take the form of animals representing our own animal nature⁴¹. It should be remarked that the analysis presented in this article is not meant to refer to Krishna as such, but rather to the collective unconscious of the myth-makers. "In myths, the terrific wishes and impulses of unconscious fantasy are defused by the very fact of the fantasy's becoming collectively shared rather than remaining an individual burden, and by the simple device of its being externalized and projected onto mythical heroes and heroines⁴²".

The significance of these stories for the children of India today

Down the ages, these stories have enthralled children and adults alike, and have nourished their devotional life. But in addition, they are also relevant to the problems of Indian children today.

Krishna's becoming a child underlines the importance and value of children. The demon Agha knew very well that, by eliminating the children, the rest of the people were as good as dead, for the children were their very life (12.15). Today's children are tomorrow's India. The first three or four years are crucial for the child's development as well as for his country's future. In a study of Indian children under five, it was found that those who were malnourished suffered a 30 percent deficit in their adult work capacity⁴⁴. What happens to our children today will affect our country tomorrow.

Krishna experiences himself as a lovable child. His parents and the other adults share a deep intimacy of love and affection with him. The children are not forced into an artificial mould, but rather allowed to grow naturally in freedom. The carrot is used more than the stick. Yasoda ties Krishna up, but she also knows when to spare the rod. Some of our over-strict parents and teachers do not realize how deep a scar they leave on the psyche — and bodies too — of their children. In our cities some of our parents are so busy with their

work and other activities that they can hardly spare a minute for their children, who hunger for love.

Although born in a princely family, Krishna spends his childhood among the humble cowherds, teaching us not to discriminate between rich and poor, high caste and low caste children. Even though he was in exile from Mathura, he had a home and was surrounded with love and concern. Today we see so many vagrant and street children, who do not have a place they can call home. Their plight was poignantly portrayed in the recent film *Salaam Bombay*.

The *Bhagavata*, we have seen, calls Pūtana a child-killer. The ayurvedic writer Suśruta mentions Putana as well as Śakuni (female bird: Putana was a bird-demoness) as infantile diseases⁴⁵. We have mentioned that Aiyangar identifies Putana with the goddess of small-pox. The WHO has assured us that small-pox has been completely eradicated in the world. But many other diseases still plague our children. India is one of the forty countries whose infant mortality rate (IMR) is "very high", i.e., over 100 deaths per thousand live births⁴⁶. Even the under five mortality rate (U5MR) for India is "high"⁴⁷. In addition, thousands of children are disabled each year by diseases which could be prevented. There are many ways in which we can attack these various Putanas. UNICEF has been advocating universal immunization. Rajiv Gandhi has declared that every child in India will be immunized by the year 1990. If that happens, it will save over one million children each year⁴⁸. UNICEF has also launched some low-cost measures. Health care is of prime importance for the survival of our children. Proper sanitation and clean drinking water are absolutely essential⁴⁹. Yasoda never forgets to give Krishna his bath. We should also remember the story of the boy Krishna subduing and banishing Kaliya so that the waters become purified (ch. 16). Large scale health education will help our people be forewarned and prepared; Krishna was well aware of Putana's identity. Our village health guides, community health projects, etc. can do a lot to neutralize the lethal poison of Putana.

Krishna and his companions are able to lead a carefree life full of fun and games. But many of our children simply do not know what childhood fun is. In spite of the recom-

mentations of the ILO and the many laws governing child labour in India, there are thousands of our youngsters who have to work several hours a day, sometimes even in unhealthy and hazardous conditions⁵⁰.

The cowherd children are able to enjoy the salubrious, fresh air in the ever green pastures and lush forests of Vrndavana. Nowadays many of our children live in congested, suffocating localities and slums. Large scale deforestation brings a number of evil consequences. Even our most sacred river is terribly polluted. About 70 percent of all available water is unsafe for drinking⁵¹. If in our concrete jungles we cannot be close to sylvan peace and beauty, at least we could work towards developing decent parks and playgrounds at convenient distances.

Brahma's abduction of the children reminds us of the many kidnappers of our children. Many are deliberately and systematically maimed and forced to become beggars to collect alms to support their kidnappers; Others are forced into prostitution and still others are brutally castrated. Brahma at least returned the children. Who will bring back our children?

There are a number of projects undertaken by government and non-government agencies, focusing on the problems of nutrition, health, sanitation, education, environmental protection, etc. For example, the ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) has been able to reduce the infant and child mortality rates and malnutrition in the project areas⁵². Often, however, bad management, corruption and lethargy prevent the benefits from percolating to the needy. What is being done is but a drop in the ocean: we have a long way to go.

Who will fight the various monsters that still prey on our children? Let us not wait for a future Messiah or Kalkin. The cowherds of Krishna's day decided to move to Vrndavana. Let us join hands, pool our resources and take a step forward towards that impossible dream of ensuring that our children enjoy the rights listed in the *Declaration of the Rights of the Child*, unanimously adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20th November, 1959.

Footnotes

- 1 See my book, *The Divinity of Krishna*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1984.
- 2 *Srimadbhagavatam*, Bombay: Srivenkatesvara Press, Samvat 1971 [1914]
- 3 See *Srimadbhagavatam*, ed. by Pandeya Ramtej Sastri (Benares: Pandit Pustakalaya, Samvat 2002 1945), on 10.12.37.
- 4 Benjamin Preciado-Solis, *The Krishna Cycle in the Puranas: Themes and Motifs in a Heroic Saga*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984.
- 5 Besides the slaughter of the innocents, there are also other similarities between the infancy narratives of Krishna and Christ. Although the *Bhagavadgita* is pre-christian the stories of the child Krishna, as we have them, are post-christian, although some fragments of the cycle are before Christ Raychaudhuri refutes the contention of previous European scholars that the Krishna stories were (indirectly) borrowed from Christianity: see Hemchandra Raychaudhuri, *Materials for the Study of the Early History of the Vaishnava Sect*, 2nd rev. ed., Calcutta, University of Calcutta, 1936. However, this does not exclude mutual influences between the two religions in the formation of the myths.
- 6 It is outside the scope of this article to compare the Hindu conception of *avatara* (descent) with Christian incarnation.
- 7 Although in one verse (1.3 28), the *Bhagavata* declares that Krishna is the Lord himself, in several passages he is said to be only a portion (*amsa*) of Visnu
- 8 G. Van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, tr. J. E. Turner, 2 vols, reprinted., Gloucester, Mass., 1967), 1:109.
- 9 Preciado-Solis, *Krishna Cycle*, pp. 62-65.
- 10 Jean Herbert, *Le yoga de l'amour: la geste de Krishna*, Spiritualités vivantes, Serie Hindouisme (Paris: Albin Michel, 1973), P. 30.
- 11 Ibid., pp. 56-57. 12 Ibid., pp. 61-63. 13 Ibid., p. 67.
- 14 C. G Jung and C. Kerenyi, *Introduction to a Science of Mythology: The Myth of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis*, tr. R. F. C. Hull (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951; reprinted 1970) pp. 117-121.
- 15 Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Hindu Myths* (Middlesex. Penguin Books, 1975), p. 206.
- 16 Sukumari Bhattacharji, *The Indian Theogony: A Comparative Study of Indian Mythology from the Vedas to the Puranas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 301.
- 17 Richard M. Dorson, "The Eclipse of Solar Mythology" In Thomas A. Sebeak, ed., *Myth: A Symposium* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press 1958; Midland ed. 1965), pp. 25-63.
- 18 See my article "Salvation through Hate", *Vidyajyoti* 46.4 (April 1982): 193-198.
- 19 Herbert, *Le yoga de l'amour*, pp. 72-75.
- 20 Sudhir Kakar, *The Inner World; A Psycho-analytic Study of Child-*

- hood and Society in India, 2nd ed. (Delhi. Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 147-150.
- 21 Bhattacharji, *Indian Theogony*, pp. 303-304.
 - 22 N. Aiyangar, *Essays in Indo-Aryan Mythology*, Part II (Madras, 1901), p. 508, cited by Sindhu S. Dange, *The Bhagavata Purana Mytho-Social Study* (Delhi: Ajanta publications, 1984), p. 163.
 - 23 Cited by Gangasahaya in his commentary on the *Bhagavata Purana* (see n 3), on 10.7.7.
 - 24 Herbert, *Le yoga de l'amour*, pp. 78-82.
 - 25 Ibid., pp. 84-91. 26 Ruben, *Krishna*, pp. 80-81.
 - 27 Daniel H. H. Ingalls, Foreword to *Krishna Myths, Rites, and Attitudes*, ed. Milton Singer (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1966; Chicago: Phoenix ed., 1968), p. vii.
 - 28 For the positive use of *maya* in the *Bhagavata*, see my *Divinity of Krishna*, pp. 89-90.
 - 29 David R. Kinsley, *The Divine Player. A Study of Krishna Lila* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979), ch. 1.
 - 30 Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, Beacon Paperback, 1955), pp. 3-9.
 - 31 Kinsley, *Divine Player*, pp. 67-68.
 - 32 See my "The Justification of Krishna's Childhood Pranks", presented at the VIIth World Sanskrit Conference, Leiden, 1997 forthcoming.
 - 33 Norwin Hein, *The Miracle Plays of Mathura*, Delhi. Oxford University Press, 1972.
 - 34 See my articles mentioned in n. 6.
 - 35 John Stratton Hawley, "Thief of Butter, Thief of Love" *History of Religions* 18:3 (February 1979): 212-214.
 - 36 Kinsley, *Divine Player*, pp. 70 and 74.
 - 37 Herbert, *Le yoga de l'amour*, pp. 124-125.
 - 38 See my *Divinity of Krishna*, pp. 130-131.
 - 39 On Krishna's control over fate, and the attempt of commentators to explain away the present exception, see Ibid., 97-98.
 - 40 Jung "Child-Archetype" pp. 123-124.
 - 41 Masson "Childhood of Krishna", p. 459.
 - 42 Kakar, *Inner World*, p. 146.
 - 43 Herbert, *Le yoga de l'amour*, pp. 137-139.
 - 44 James P. Grant, *The State of the World's Children*, 1986 (New York: UNICEF Division of Communication and Information, 1986), p. 71.
 - 45 Cited in Preciado-Solis, *Krsna Cycle*, p. 57, n. 8.
 - 46 Grant, *State of World's Children*, p. 84.
 - 47 *UNICEF Annual Report*, 1987 (New York: UNICEF, 1987), p. 28.
 - 48 Grant, *State of World's Children*, p. 2.
 - 49 *Review of Situation of Children: India*, pp. 57-62.
 - 50 K. M. Phadke, ed., *Child Labour in India*, Calcutta. India Book Exchange, 1979.
 - 51 *Review of Situation of Children: India*, pp. 53-56.
- Ibid., pp. 21-22,